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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

HOW TO SKETCH

Successful drawing habits of pro artists

FEATURING
TONY DITERLIZZI
TERRYL WHITLATCH
MILES JOHNSTON
ROBH RUPPEL
AND MORE

16
PAGES OF EPIC READER ART

WORKSHOP
CREATE UNIQUE PORTRAITS

Pose and silhouette tips with Tan Zhi Hui

PLUS!
SCULPT AND GLAZE A FAERIE HOUSE
DIGITAL SKETCHING IN PHOTOSHOP
MESH SKILLS IN ZBRUSH CORE

IMPROVE YOUR

CHARACTER ART

Discover how to add more personality, style and narrative to your character designs

Future

GREG RUTH! INTERVIEW WITH THE MASTER ARTIST ON HIS INCREDIBLE PORTFOLIO

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Welcome to…

ImagineFX
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

I keep looking at the brooding image of the woman on the cover and ruminating on what her story is. Who is she? Is she good or evil? Maybe she's regal and lamenting the loss of power in her kingdom. I find her unique and engaging, and that's what makes great characters.

The story of how this cover came about is an unusual one for us. We saw Ramón Nuñez's sketch online and asked him to work with us on making her our cover star. He gives a glimpse into this process as part of his huge tips workshop on page 64. He was perfect to work with – thanks Ramón!

I really enjoyed seeing a pottery workshop in the magazine for the first time. Vicky Stonebridge's faerie houses are gorgeous. I think I'd love to work with clay. I imagine that it's very therapeutic. Well, that's once you learn the basics and start getting it right. See for yourselves on page 104.

Finally, please submit your work to us! Simply send in up to five images of either traditional or digital art, along with their titles and a short explanation of how or why you created it. Add in a short biography, a headshot and then email it to fxpose@imaginefx.com.

Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
claire@imaginefx.com

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Artist in Residence
Oh, how I love mooching around the tools and kit of an artist's studio. Julie Beck shows you around her place.

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Greg Ruth
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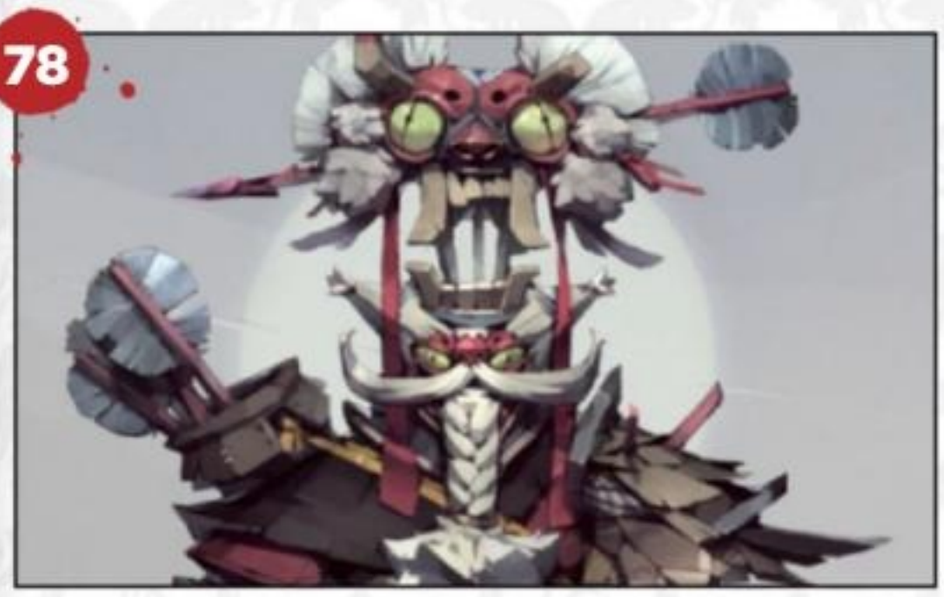

Quirky character
Tan Zhi Hui answered our call for a unique male figure concept with a strong silhouette. He delivered aplenty!

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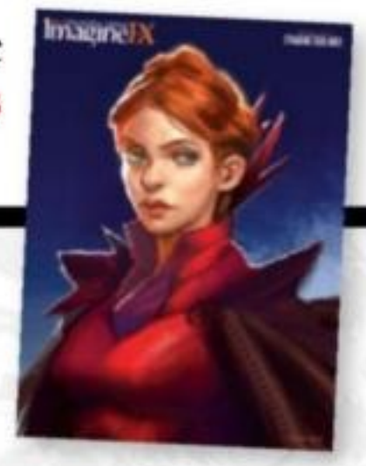

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

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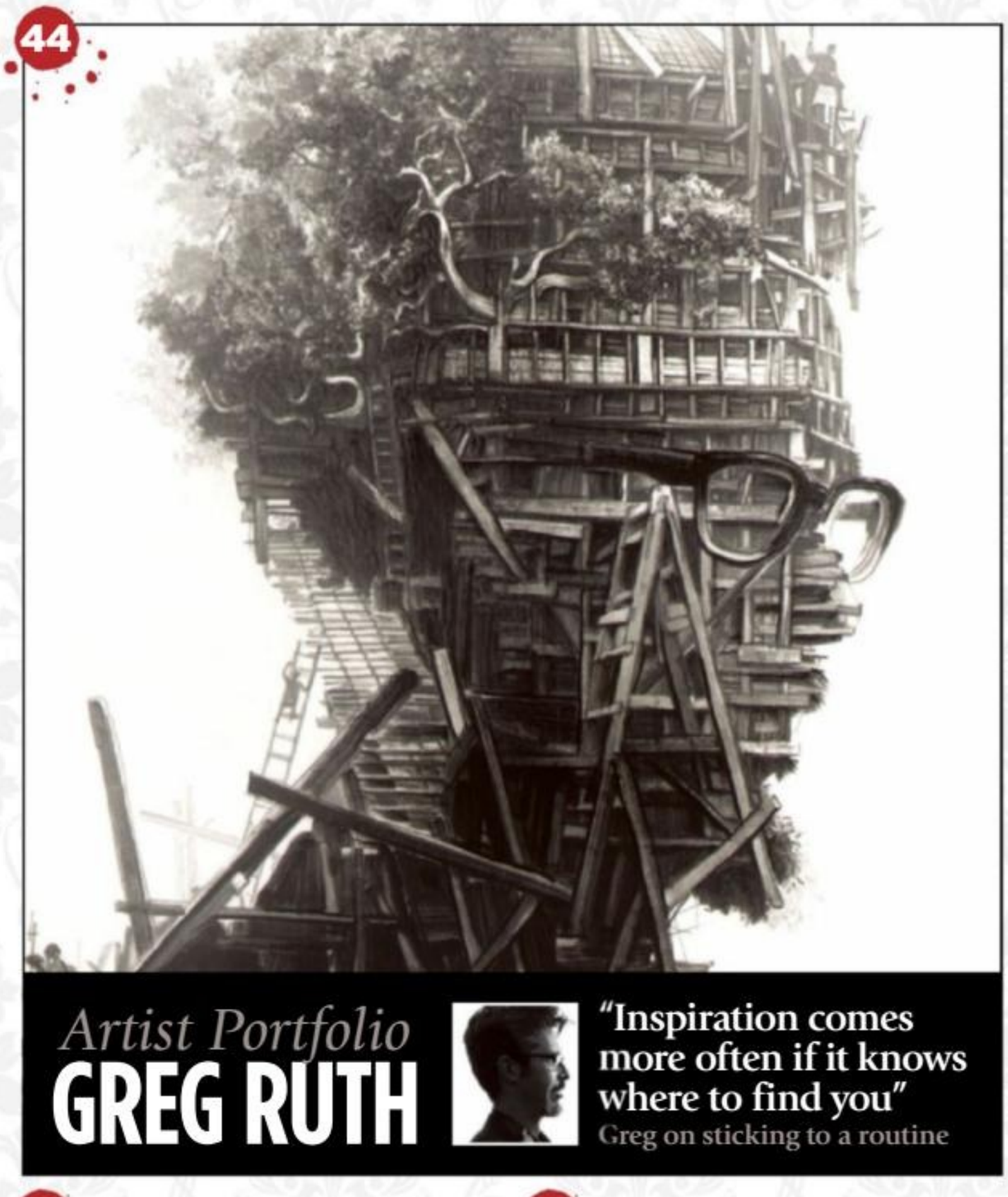
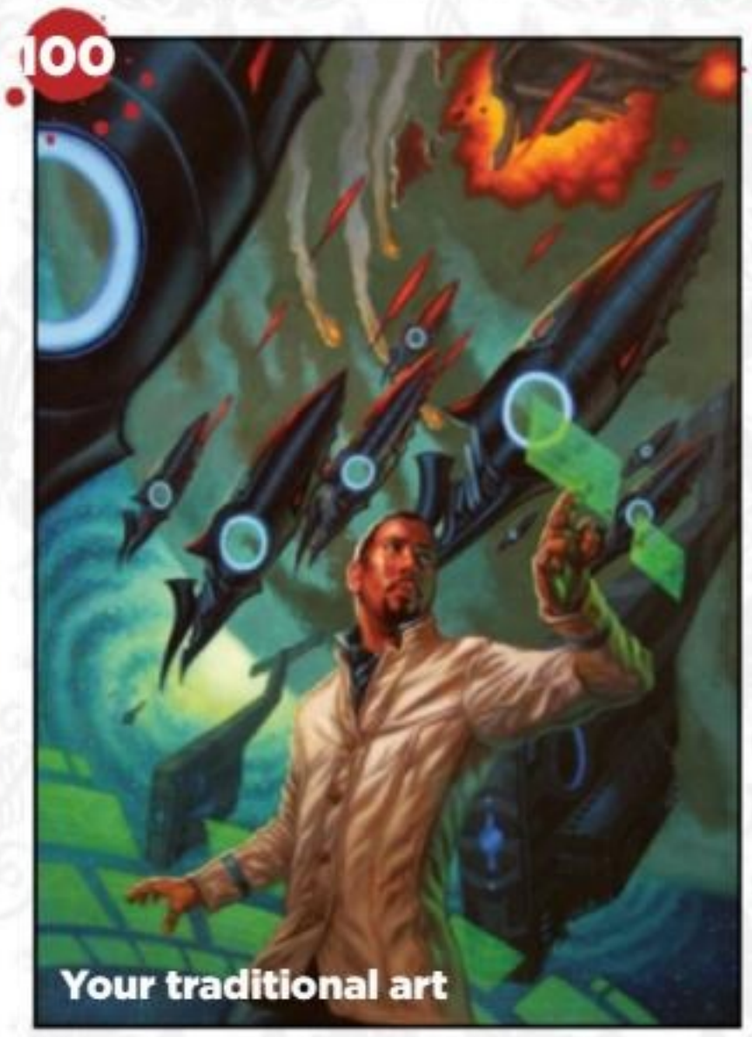


Artist Portfolio
GREG RUTH

"Inspiration comes more often if it knows where to find you"
Greg on sticking to a routine

The joy of sketch

Artist in residence: Julie Beck



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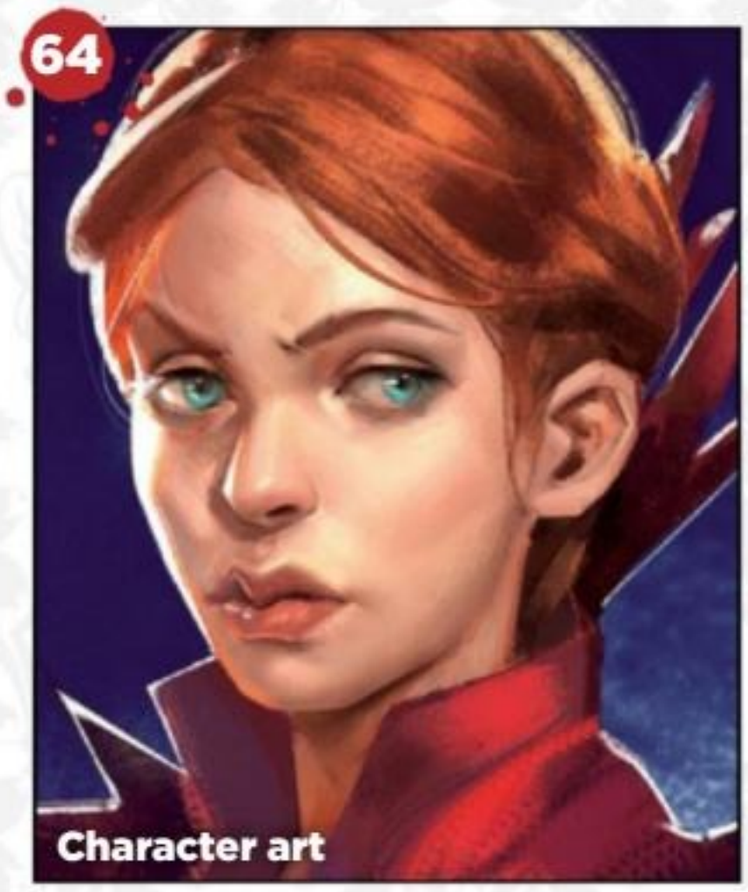

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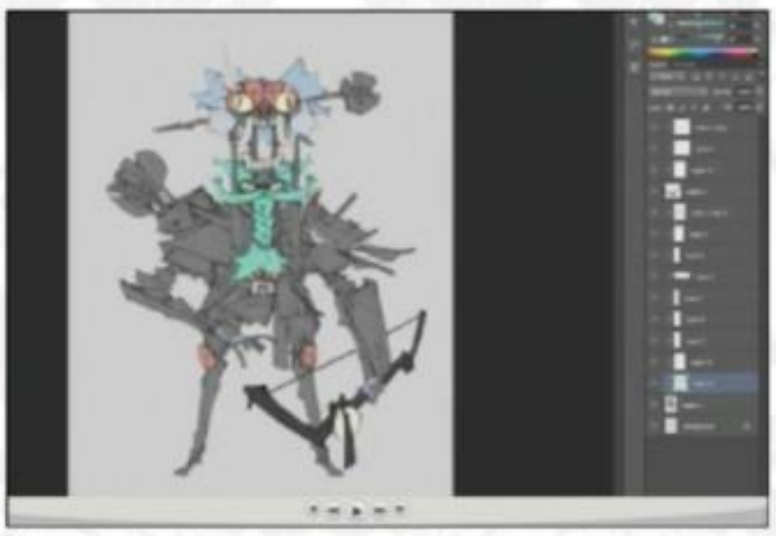
Getting hold of all of this issue's exclusive videos is quick and easy. Just visit our dedicated web page at
http://ifxm.ag/portrait153art

OVER 2 HOURS of video tutorials from pro artists to watch and learn from!

WORKSHOP VIDEO

Mix shapes for a figure design

Discover how Tan Zhi Hui creates an original fantasy character with a strong silhouette using a limited colour palette and unusual shapes. Turn to page 84 and delve into his workshop.



GET YOUR RESOURCES

You're three steps away from this issue's resource files...

1 Go to the website
Type this into your browser's address bar (not the search bar):
http://ifxm.ag/portrait153art

2 Find the files you want
Search through the list of resources to watch or download.

3 Download what you need
You can download all of the files at once, or individually.

PLUS MORE VIDEO TUITION!

Watch our videos to gain a unique insight into how our artists create their stunning art

Look around for inspiration

Atey Ghailan takes in his surroundings to produce a story-driven sketch. Watch him in action, then read his workshop on page 78.

Start working in clay!

Let Vicky Stonebridge's sculpting video get you all fired up to construct faerie houses in clay. There's more details on page 104.

Watch a sample clip from Space Princess...

...then read our review of Craig Elliott's deceptively simple video on page 95.

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Trung Le

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** klegs.deviantart.com

Trung, aka Klegs, is a student in California. He started creating digital art two years ago, mainly because he wanted to paint fan art of his favourite characters.

1 PORT
"I have little experience painting traditionally so I thought it would be interesting to reproduce watercolours digitally. It was a good learning experience."

2 UNDERGROUND CITY OVERVIEW
"This piece follows a girl and her journey through many different landscapes. I've often thought about how beautiful cities would look if humans lived underground."

3 OCHAKO URARAKA
"This was a fan art piece for the recent show called Boku Hero no Academia. The main goal of this piece was to get a bit more practice with a couple of watercolour digital brushes"

4 UNDERGROUND TOWN SHOP
"This piece explores an underground city from another perspective. I focused on trying to convey the sense of exploration you feel when you're lost in music."

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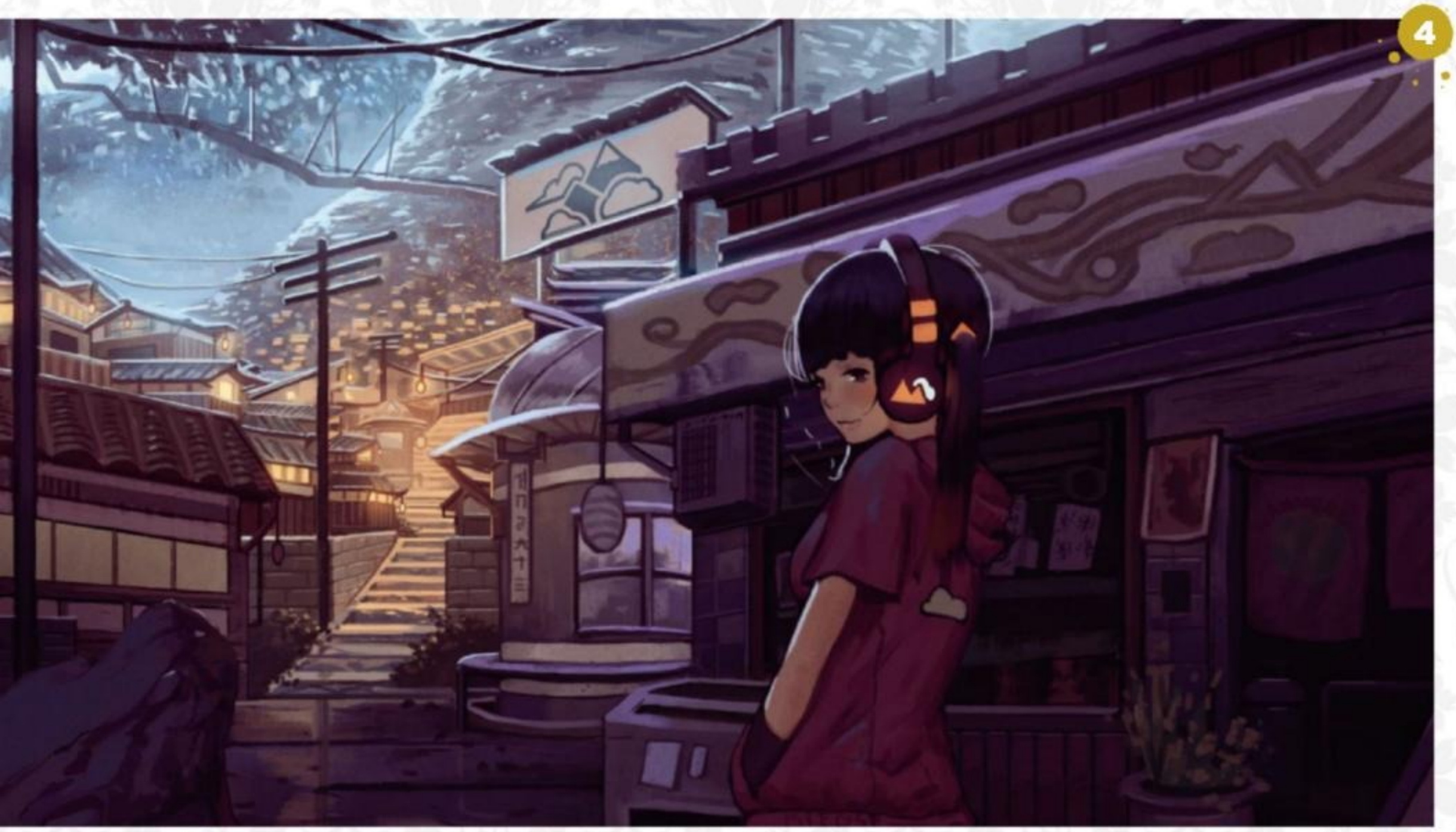
4

1

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Marzena Piwowar

LOCATION: Poland **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.behance.net/Nereidaart

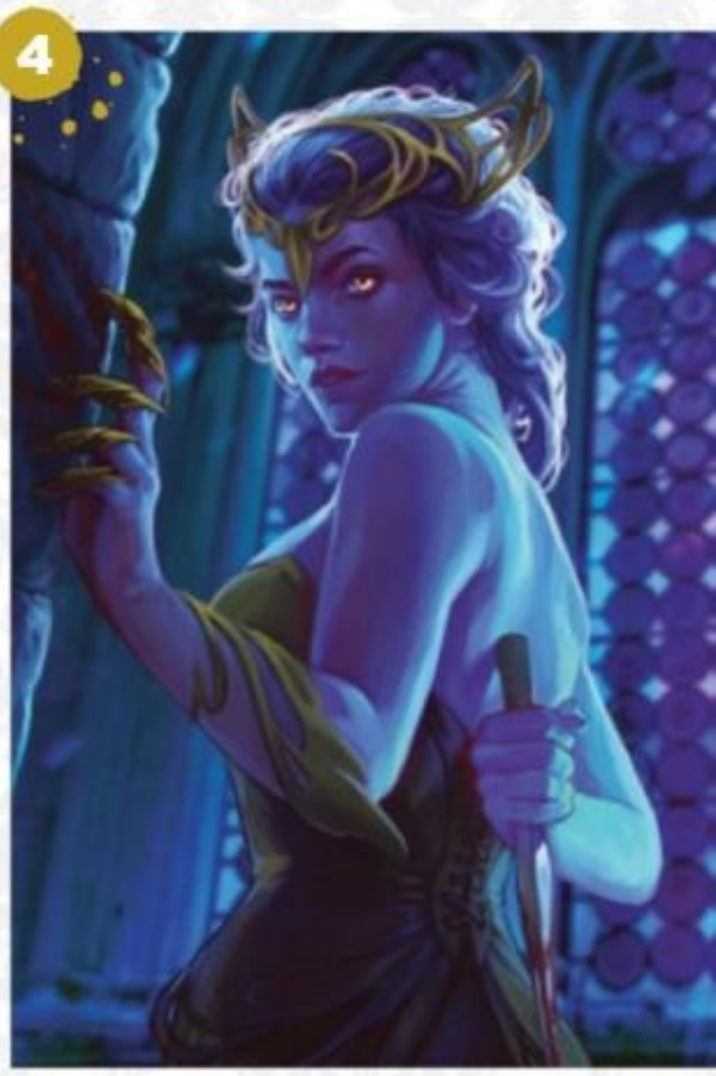
Marzena works as an artist in the gaming industry, and likes the art of Charlie Bowater. "When I explore an idea, I look for a simple visual message," she says.

1 HEATHER FAIRY
"Autumn is my favourite season. I like the musty smell of old leaves; the rustle whenever the wind blows. And I'm pretty sure there's someone you can spot among the blooming heather flowers this season."

2 JUNO
"This is the mender Juno from The Banner Saga. I imagined her as powerful but balanced with the world she lives in. She understands the song of the wind and she hears the Godstones whispering."

© This War Of Mine: The Board Game

3 THE SKY IS FALLING
"Painting this was painful. I looked for a simple visual message, and here it is: the lonely girl, searching for shells in a dirty puddle. You can clearly see footsteps around her, but she's all alone."



4 THE CREST OF TALON
"I painted this because I wanted to work on my book cover skills. I made up the idea of a secret association of priestesses, created to kill the royal family."

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FXPosé 1

Xavier Leroux

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/artist/coffeeater

Xavier is a French concept artist and illustrator who's currently living in Germany. "Drawing is an amazing way to show to others what's on your mind and in your heart," he says.

1 KAZE NI NARU

"This means 'become the wind' in Japanese. I like the poetic idea of becoming something else after life; here, I wanted to depict someone witnessing this moment."

2 SORCERESS

"I started in black and white, painting only the shadows. I combined tones using the Smudge tool, and left the lighter areas transparent. Then I painted light underneath this shadow layer. I was pleased with how everything turned out."

2

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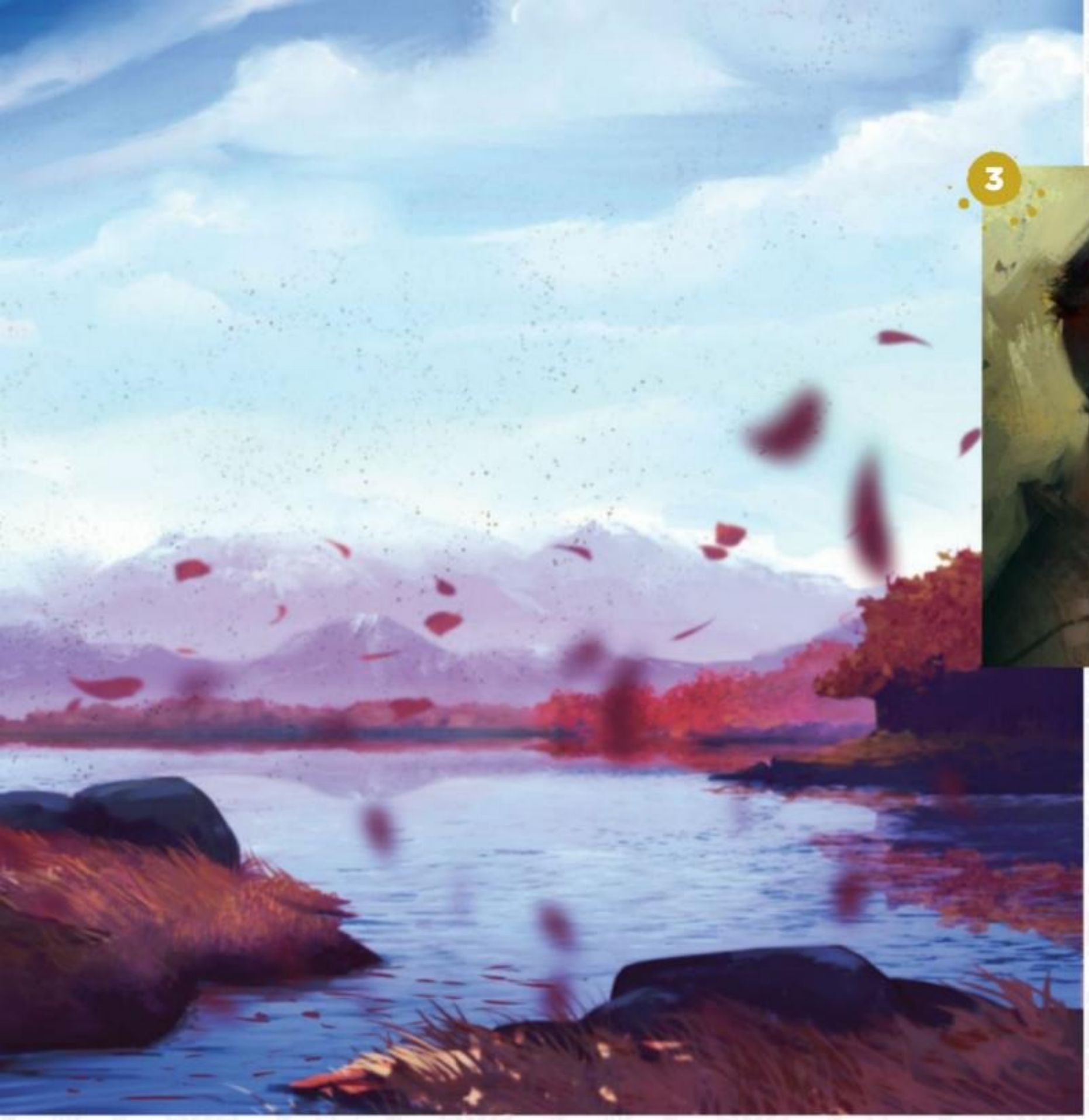

3 YOUNG REBEL
"Playing with Color Dynamics in Brush settings is an easy way to introduce variety in an image's hue and saturation. It's a good trick to make the colours vibrate and add energy to a painting."

4 TRACKING DOGS
"Here's a world where humans could domesticate dinosaurs. Who wouldn't want to go hunting with raptors instead of spaniels?"

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

Jeff Morris

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artofjekrimo.com

Freelance concept artist and illustrator Jeff tells us that, "With my images, I want to tell good old 'light conquers darkness' stories that hopefully help people conquer their own demons."

1 **PASSAGE**
"I wanted to show a group of warriors passing over terrain where a battle had long since passed, in search of their own history."

2 **STAIN**
"This piece was a major step for me: it was one of those pieces that just flowed out of me more easily than any others. The painting appeared in Infected By Art Vol. 4."

3 **FLOODS**
"I love characters that aren't afraid of the dark. Although the light is fading on the swamp, the character isn't losing confidence. The shadows should be afraid of her."

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Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

1

1 SKULL TOWERS ARCHER
"This is a character I designed for the mobile game Skull Towers. He had to be strong and represent the feel of the game. This project was very interesting because I don't usually paint men."

© Genera Games

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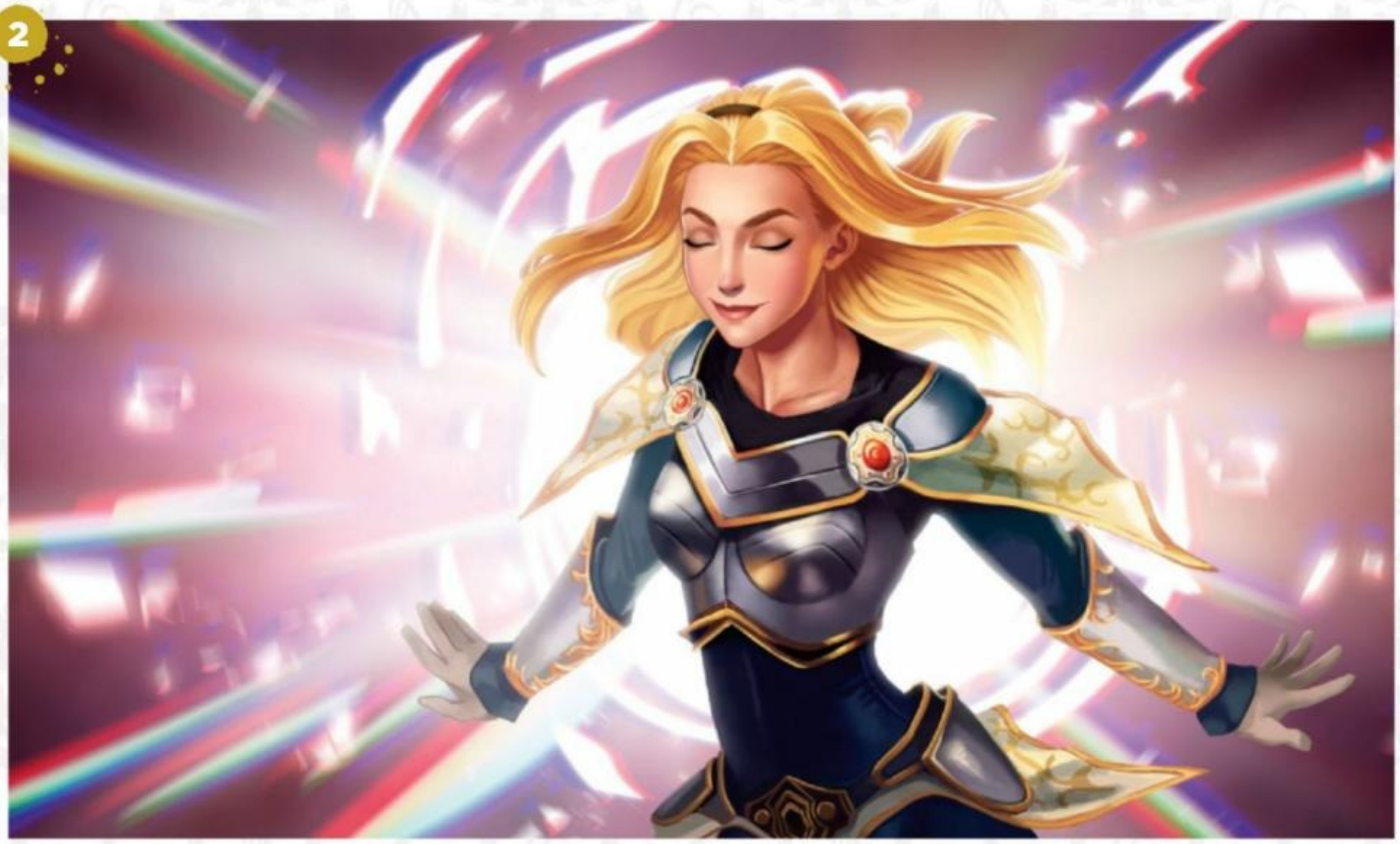
Blanca González Mengíbar

LOCATION: Spain **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/artist/blanqipu

Blanca got into digital art aged 16, and has been working as a 2D artist in the mobile games industry since 2015. "I love breaking stereotypes and painting empowered women," she tells us.

2



3

4

2 **LUX FANART**
"I'm not really into fan art but League of Legends art is always the exception to the rule. I'm fascinated by its characters and the way the illustrations are rendered."

3 **FOREST QUEEN**
"This semi-human is inspired by nature. I wanted to use the backlighting to really push my lighting skills. I like viewers to interpret who my characters are by leaving clues in their outfit."

4 **RESURRECTION**
"I started this by painting a model I found online, but it turned out as a completely different concept. I wanted to create a mysterious feeling around the character, especially in her hands."

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

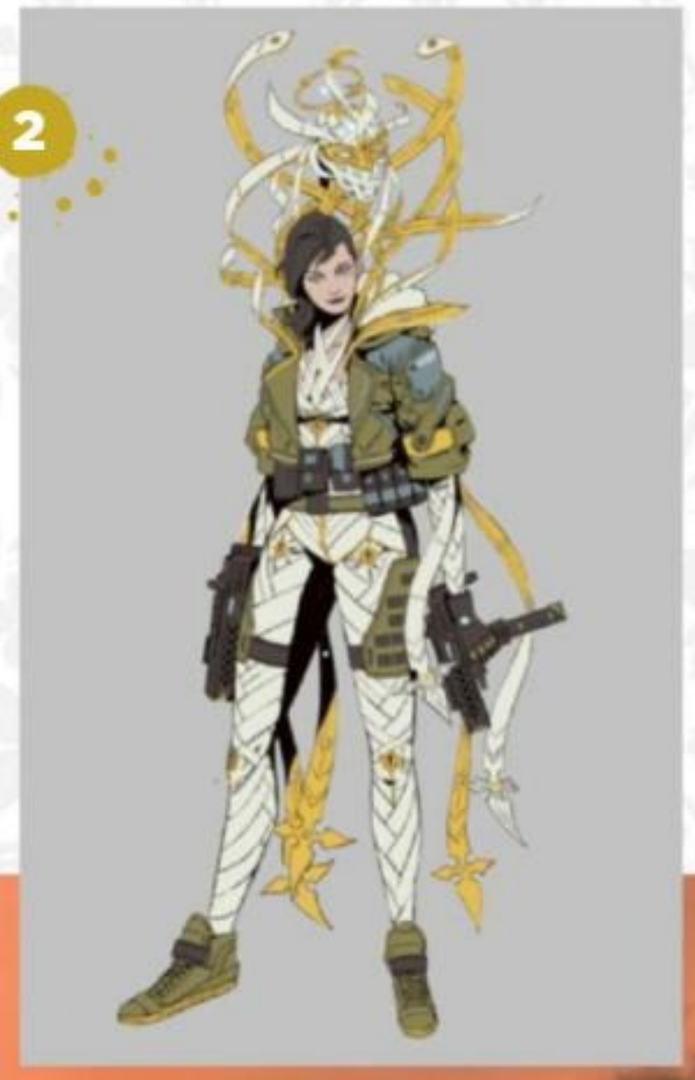
Robert Chew

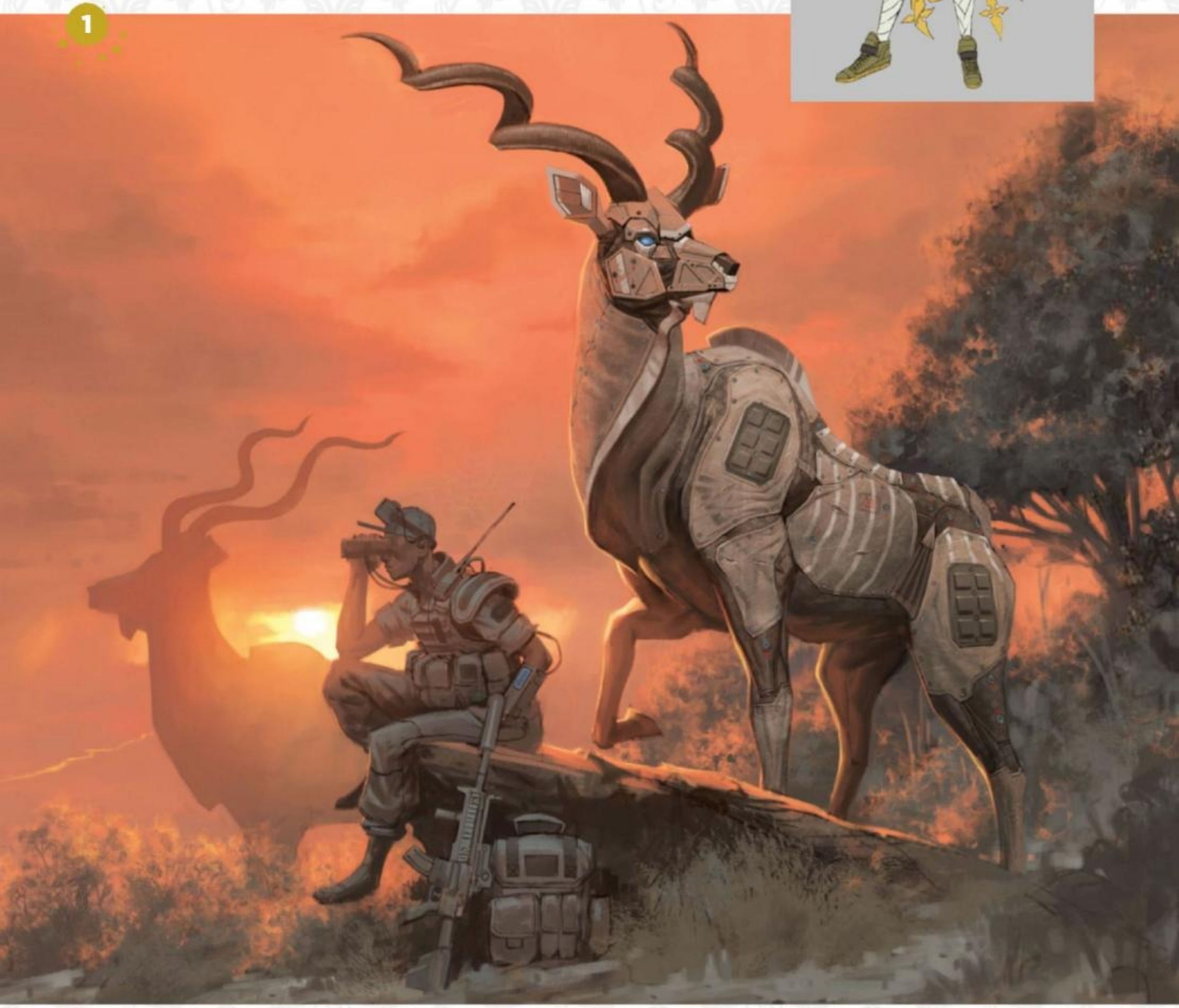
LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.robertbchew.carbonmade.com

Rob is a concept artist, and anti-poaching robots and occult spec-ops soldiers feature a lot in his work: "Believability and functional design are key."

1 KUDU TWINS
"These are Kudu anti-poaching drones on patrol. They usually operate in pairs. I wanted to feature the majesty and grace of their real-life counterparts."

2 AGENTS OF VIRTUE: CHASTITY
"The angel encases the agent with its ribbon-like body, providing extra protection. This is one of seven agents inspired by the seven heavenly virtues."





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3

3 VULTURE MEDICAL RESPONSE
"This is a white-backed vulture patrol drone, an aerial recon drone used to monitor endangered animals. I was inspired by the use of drones in real-life anti-poaching operations."

4

4 AGENTS OF SIN: SUPPLICANT
"Through ruthless training and conditioning, a new agent – called a supplicant – can pair with a demon and become a true Agent of Sin."

5

5 AGENTS OF SIN: SLOTH
"A mobile tank class. For this series I explored a more minimal style, with a focus on shape, design and colour palette instead of rendering."

Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to **fxpose@imaginefx.com**

ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS
ImagineNation
AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

The joy of sketch

Roughing it Sketching isn't just a means to an end, it's a way of life, as **Tom May** finds out…

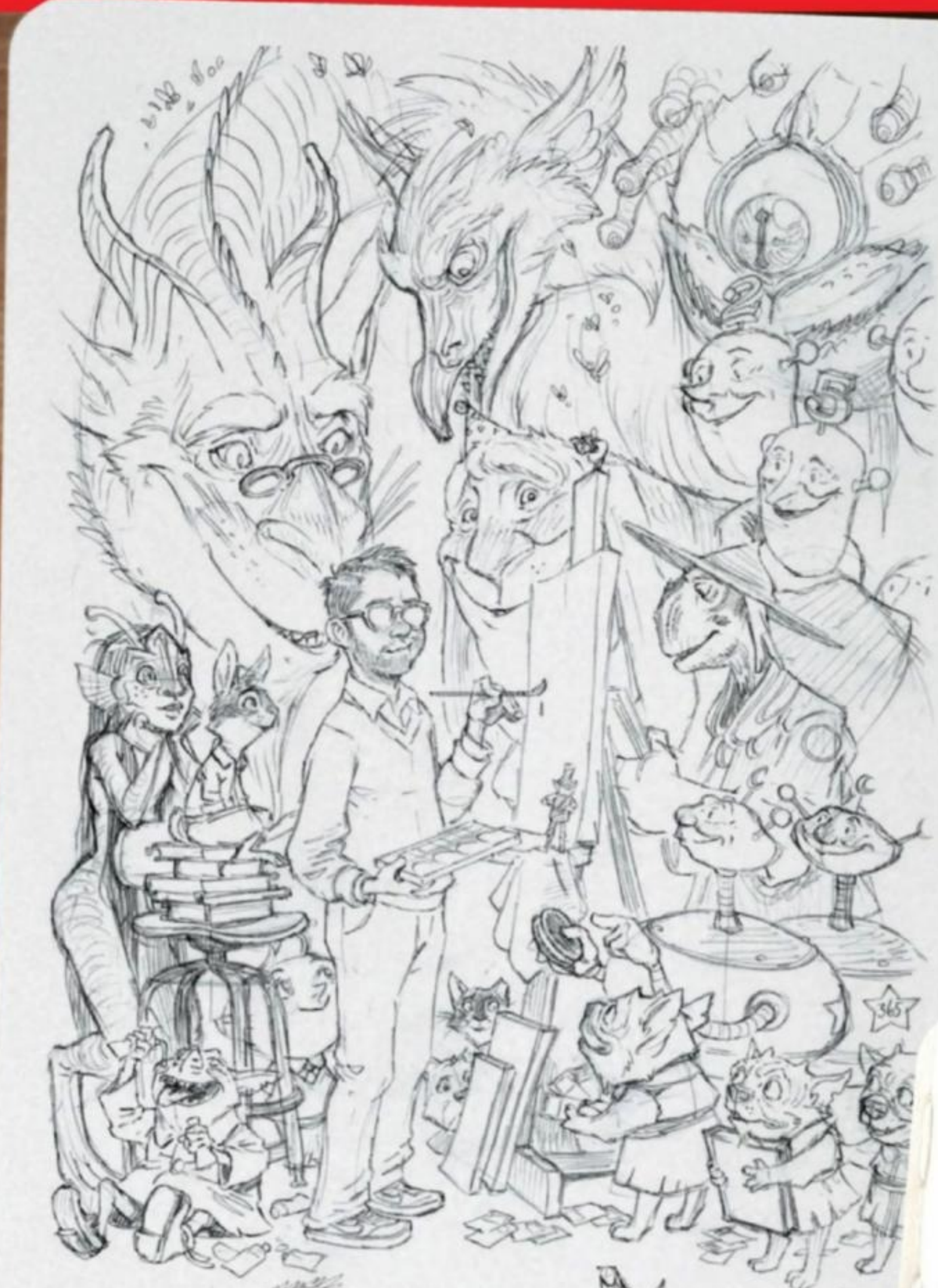
Every artist spends time sketching, usually at the start of a project, as a technique for formulating and refining their vision. But sketching shouldn't just be a means to an end. It's also vital part of developing yourself as an artist.

As **Terryl Whitlatch** puts it: "Sketching is the equivalent of the daily ballet barre. It gets your imagination going and gives your skills a workout: it's foundational for any artist. Sketching regularly helps you become better as an artist, and gives you a platform to experiment, mess up, try again (and again), and grow."

It's also a good way to come up with new ideas, as long as you're prepared to open your mind, let loose, and see where the sketch takes you, says **Miles Johnston**.

"One of my anatomy teachers once told me that every time you sit down to draw, you want it to look good," he says. "But that can get in the way of many other kinds of thinking." Sketching with no formal plan, in contrast, can free you from these restrictions, and lead to unexpected ideas and concepts spilling out onto your canvas.

That's something **Olly Lawson** regularly experiences. "Some days I'll sit down with nothing in mind, just to let myself doodle, and an almost fully formed idea will come out of nowhere," he says.



Tony DiTerlizzi's sketch for a poster promoting a retrospective of his work. "Off to a good start, but I erroneously composed it vertically instead of horizontally…"

"…so I scanned characters from the original sketch and then loosely roughed out a new horizontal layout in Photoshop," reveals Tony.

PENCILLING A GAME WORLD
Multi-talented artist Peter McClory is creating an original video game, one pencil-drawn level at a time and he's livestreaming the progress!
Page 25

MULTI-TASK WORK SPACE
Julie Beck shows us around her studio, which is also where she helps run ARA Boston, a private art school. And she loves having students around!
Page 26

BAGGING RIGHTS
The success of 2014's Nomad Satchel has led to the development of two thoughtfully designed art satchels that are ideal for those plein air assignments.
Page 31

"Here's what one of my typical thumbnails looks like," says Miles Johnston. "My sketching process is very chaotic and messy."

Sketch by Robh Ruppel. "I don't put a time limit on it," he says. "I sketch until I have an idea that's worth pursuing."

James Gurney's sketch of his son glassblowing: "I'm intrigued by the colours of his skin tones as they're lit by the warm light of the torch," says the illustrator.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

TONY DITERLIZZI

The fantasy artist and book creator on his sketching regime

How often do you sketch?
If it's for a finished illustration, I spend quite a bit of time at the sketch stage. I think of it as drawing the blueprint to a building: all elements need to be sorted out before I lay the foundation. It's easier to explore ideas with pencil on paper.

Aside from that, I often sketch random ideas conjured from a relaxed state of mind. Accessing this part of my imagination enables me to sketch out unusual ideas which I can later bring into finished illustrations.

Is there a particular time, place or situation, in which you might start sketching?
I sketch daily, and will draw almost anywhere. Sometimes I doodle at the kitchen table, or sketch in my studio with music blaring. It depends on my mood, deadline and subject. Often, I'll sketch a copy of a master artist to gain an understanding of how they worked.

What do you use?
I always keep a sketchbook for jotting down random ideas, scribble down thumbnail sketches of image compositions, or to design characters. If I'm working on a planned illustration I often sketch on loose paper so that I can easily scan the drawing. From there, I'll open the scan in Photoshop so that I can correct and adjust the drawing or combine multiple sketches to form a composite for a more complex illustration.

Tony is a fantasy artist, film producer and children's book creator. He illustrated The Spiderwick Chronicles books.

www.diterlizzi.com

© istock.com/mustafahacalaki

James' sketching kit features a watercolour sketchbook, about 10 pan watercolours and a few tubes of gouache.

Nocturnal Gryphon concept for Griffandia, by Terryl Whitlach.

Everyone's agrees, then, that regular sketching is essential. But how do you go about it in practice? That seems to be more of a personal thing.

HOW OFTEN?

Take frequency. **James Gurney**, for example, favours Edwin Austin Abbey's advice to a young art student: "You should be sketching always, always." So he tries to fit sketching into every spare moments he has, especially when waiting.

"In recent months I've sketched in the grocery store while my wife shopped, I've drawn the interior of the car repair shop while getting an oil change, and I've sketched fellow people around me in the diner," he says.

Terryl Whitlatch took inspiration from Dr. Seuss when she sketched out The Gack.

Terryl, however, says her best work is done in the morning, after she walks her greyhound, Josette, and she avoids sketching in the evening.

"I like to sketch just about anywhere, but sketching at museums is particularly relaxing," she adds. "At the zoo, I'll sketch sleeping animals; when they're moving around, it's like a workout. I also like sketching on airplanes, on cocktail napkins. That's often where I've sketched some of what I consider my best ideas."

Terryl, for example, favours Canson tracing paper. "It's a great surface with a subtle velvety took, and fairly sturdy," she says. "The fact that it's 'only tracing paper' and not an expensive Moleskine that I'm afraid to mess up gives me a psychological permission to be free, experiment and explore."

Following a similar logic, Miles uses pencils with a thick lead, or ballpoint pens, "for any sketching where I want to be loosey-goosey. That's because when you're sketching in pen, you expect to muck it up a bit, so that makes it easier to think in the right way. You're taking visual notes instead of trying to make something pretty."

> **"I try to limit my sketching to studio time; otherwise there's no time to let your brain just process everything"**

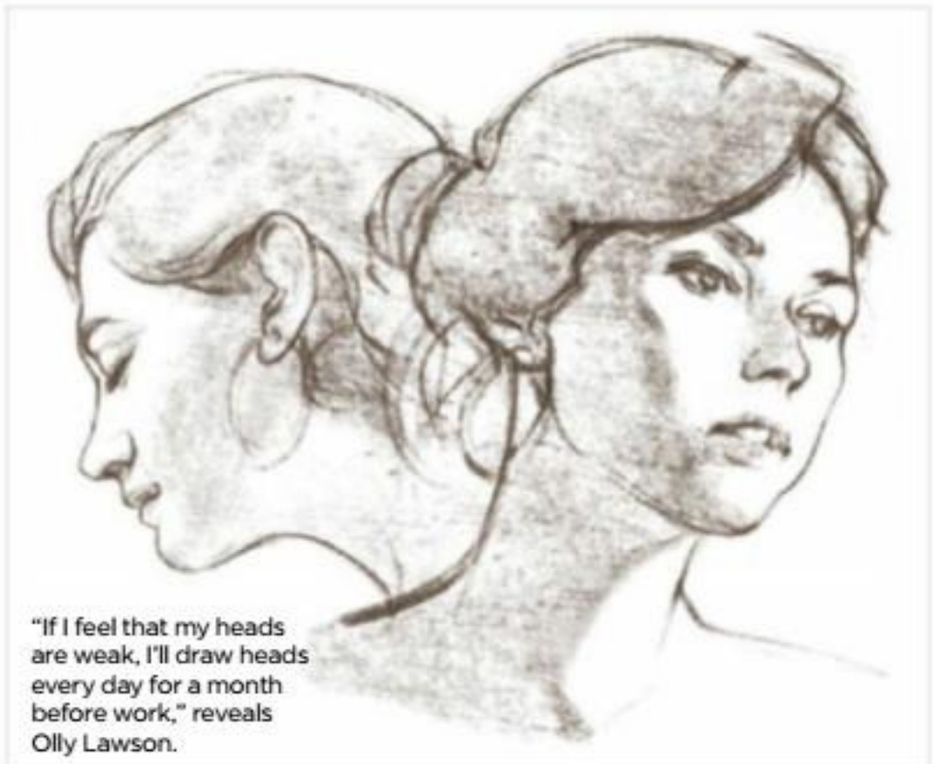
Miles, however, limits his sketching to work hours only. "There are those artists who are never not drawing, but it works better for me to let myself rest a lot," he explains. "So I try to limit my sketching to studio time; otherwise there's no time to let your brain just process everything."

SKETCHING TOOLS

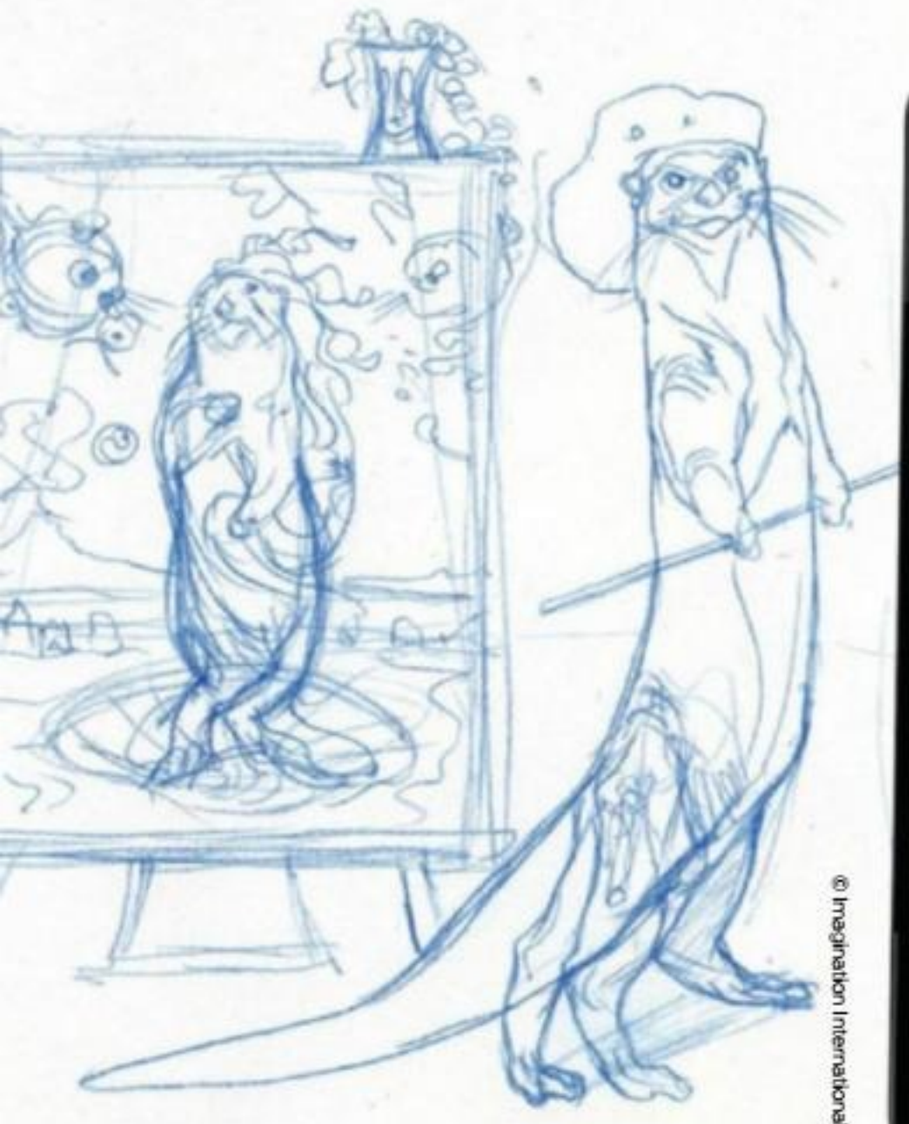
Something else that varies from artist to artist are the tools they use for sketching, although each of our creatives offers a clear reason for their particular choices.

Olly, however, has always found it "very daunting" using pencil and paper for sketching, and so since January he's been using the iPad Pro and Apple Pencil instead.

"With paper, you're making a permanent record, and you feel like you're under pressure to create something perfect," he says. "I like to have a warm-up for maybe the first half-hour to an hour, in which I expect the drawings to come out terrible, so



"If I feel that my heads are weak, I'll draw heads every day for a month before work," reveals Olly Lawson.



Sketch of Sandro Ottercelli by Terryl Whitlach, for the upcoming book Punny Animals, Vol. 1: Famous Animal Artists of Art History.

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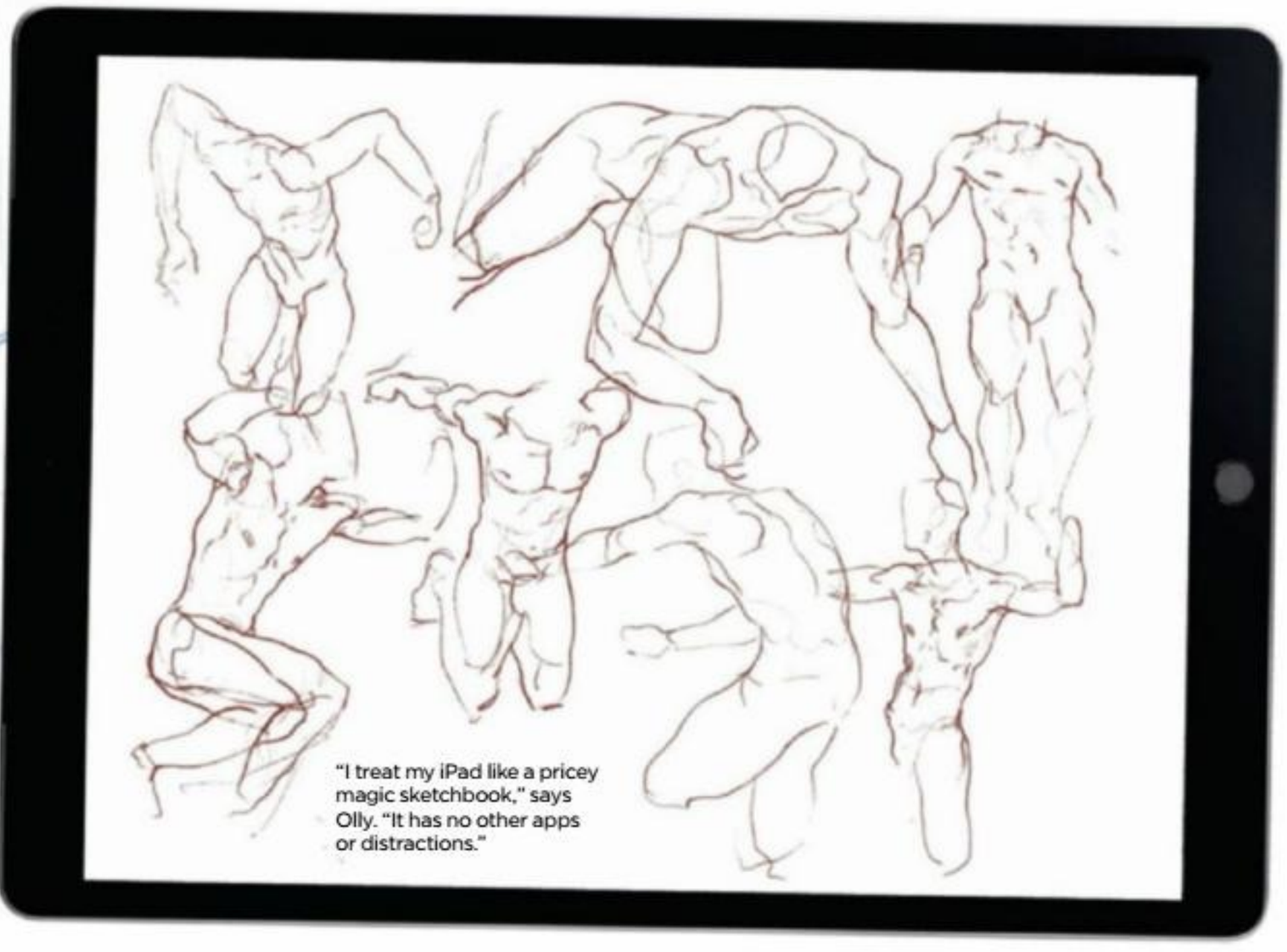

"I treat my iPad like a pricey magic sketchbook," says Olly. "It has no other apps or distractions."

"Sketching isn't about coming up with a finished drawing," says Robh. "It can be a loose doodle to try out as a concept, too."

I don't want to do that on paper. It's a lot easier if I just wipe the canvas like the iPad lets me do, and it's just as portable as a sketchbook."

James, meanwhile, uses watercolour, gouache and casein, and sketches in a watercolour journal, typically a Moleskine or Pentalic 5x8 inch. "They're the fastest and most versatile media, and they combine well with each other," he says. "I use a homemade sketch easel whenever I can, to get the work up out of my lap and near the line of sight."

For **Robh Ruppel**, however, the tools aren't important at all. "I have several Moleskines, but I also sketch on my phone," he explains. "The ideas are more important than the medium, I've found."

STORING YOUR SKETCHES

Finally, what to do with your sketches once they're done? While Olly likes to delete his digital sketches as he goes, he's very much in the minority.

"I keep all my sketch books," reveals Robh. "They are diaries, archeology, time machines, maps, journals and testing grounds." James, meanwhile, shares his sketches online, videos them for putting on YouTube, publishes them in magazines and books, and has even released his own iOS and Android app based on them, called Living Sketchbook.

Top: "Before I use reference I'll sketch from imagination and focus on designing interesting strong shapes," says Miles.

Below: "As you can see the original plan shows through, underneath all of the details and polish," he adds.

Terryl doesn't go that far, but does store all the sketches she likes in labelled folders in a dedicated flat file drawer. "That organisation lightens my heart and mind, and fuels my creativity," she says. "There are enough things in life beyond our control, and being able to lay one's hands on sketches is one less thing to worry about."

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STREAMING LIVE WORLDWIDE

Peter created this environment concept for a cross-platform adventure game, drawn in pencil and then coloured digitally.

Initial concept work for a Green Man giant who's formed out of trees.

Click on the draw

Background material Peter McClory explains why he's livestreaming his traditional art game environments

Artist, interactive designer and music producer Peter McClory wears a lot of hats. But recently, he's decided to focus his energies on the thing he's most passionate about: drawings trees and other organic objects, then using them to create assets for cross-platform games.

So in January, Peter launched a self-funded venture, Pencil Drawn Games. And first order of business has been drawing a series of stunning environments using pencil and paper, which he then scans in and colours in Photoshop.

Unusually, he's not even thinking about the actual game itself at this stage. The reason? "I've seen so many game designers work endlessly to create the perfect game, only for them to release it and then realise no one knows about it," he explains. "So instead I'm focusing on building up social media awareness and an online following as I go."

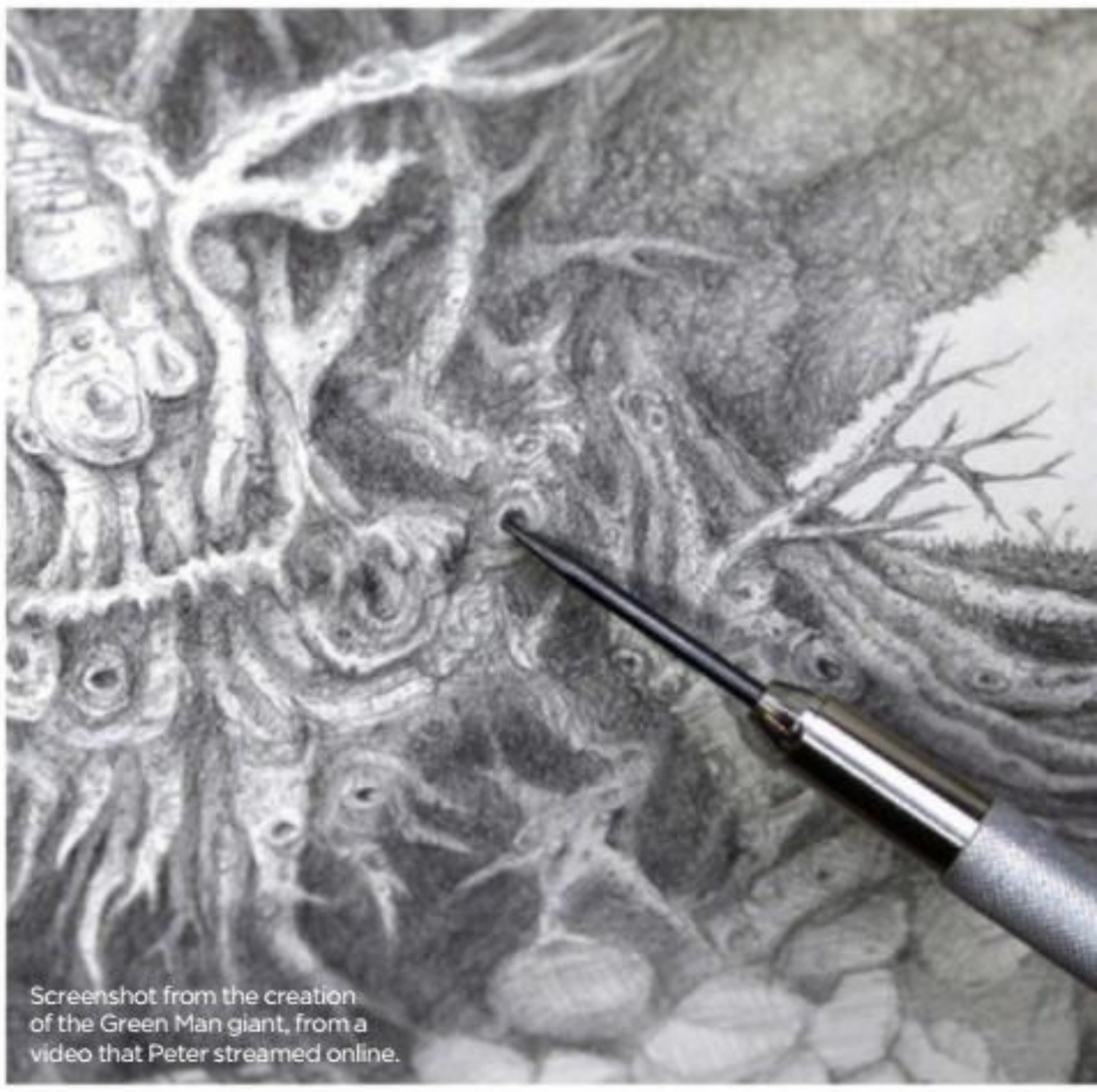
All the art **Peter** creates, then, is being shared via his own website. He's also livestreaming its creation via TwitchTV, and posting the videos on YouTube. The idea is to encourage feedback from artists, gaming fans, and anyone else who's interested.

"Only when I'm happy with the art will I move it into Unity and plan the game mechanics," he says. "The aim is to release something before Christmas, although that may be an interactive environment rather than a full game."

Watch and read more about Peter's progress on his video game project at **www.pencildrawngames.com**.

Peter's floating islands become self-contained game environments.

Floating islands drawn in pencil, then scanned into Photoshop and painted.



Screenshot from the creation of the Green Man giant, from a video that Peter streamed online.

Julie Beck

Creative nucleus This space functions both as a studio and the control centre of the Academy of Realist Art, Boston.

My studio doubles as working space, but it's also the office out of which I run the school as the assistant director. ARA Boston is a private art school teaching the fundamentals of representational drawing and painting. (Think of learning the musical scales and chords in order to master an instrument.)

While some people might hate the idea of being constantly surrounded by students asking questions, having existential crises, looking for scissors... I absolutely love it!

Photo by John Asimacopoulos

I work day and night in this studio, but I'm not the only one who makes my dream a possibility. My husband, friends, family and mentors have all helped me along this journey.

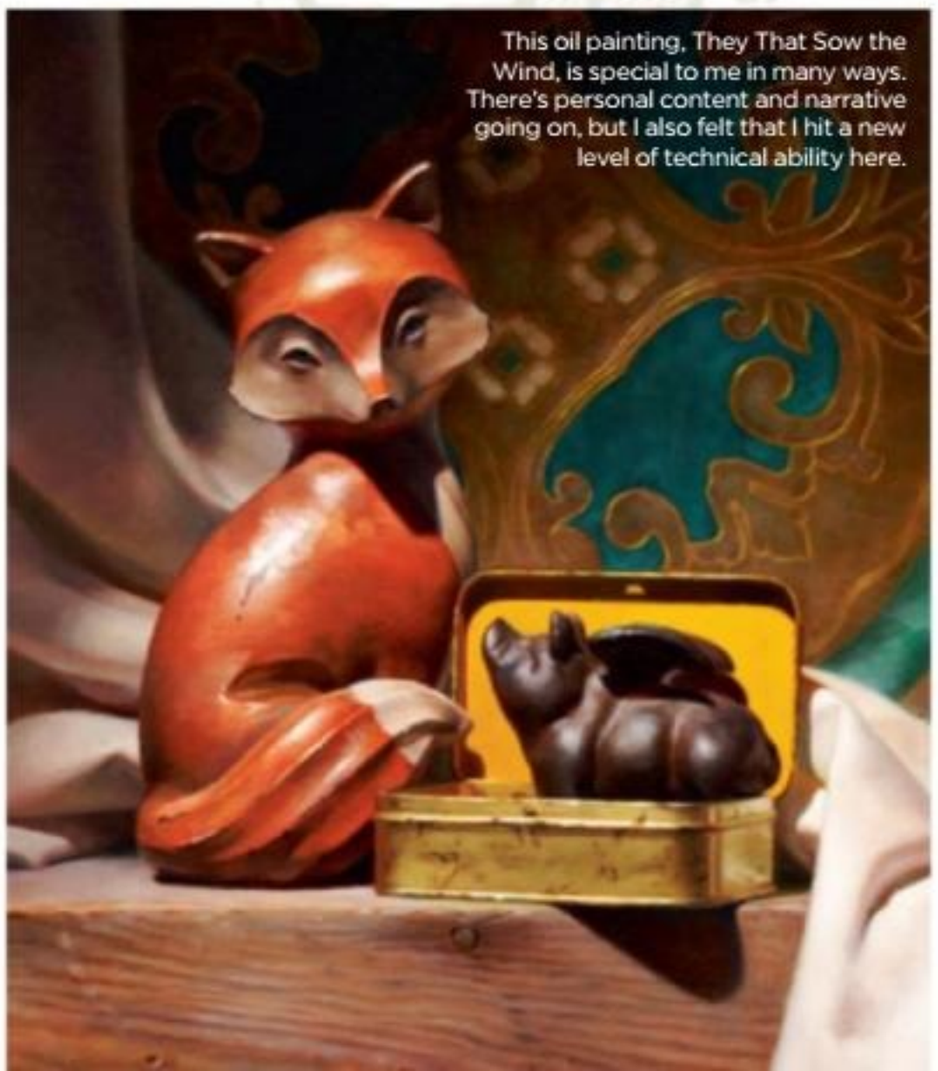
“While some people might hate the idea of being surrounded by students, I love it!”

This army shirt/painting smock is from my very first job where I worked in a prop room in an insurance company's creative services department. It acts as a reminder of how far I've come on my journey.
Studio walls are storage space for finished paintings. It's a nice way to admire how awesome my finished works are, or lament on how much I need to improve.
I prefer to work from life, but when it's not possible, I work from both printed and on-screen reference. Live elephants won't exactly sit still for me.
I use a lot of animal related themes, so it's not unusual to find random animal parts in my studio.
My favourite Pinterest find! This keeps all my paints easily accessible and in the order that I'd put them on my palette.
Sometimes I bring my dog Zoey in, but that means more time I have to spend picking stray dog hairs out of my paintings.
As an instructor, I usually have at least one project going that's a demo or example for students. This piece demonstrates how to use glazing to maximise high chroma with high value.
This rolling cart is a huge space saver. I can stay organised while everything is right at hand. I can also roll it to other floors in case I want to do some figure painting.
I can paint these bricks in my sleep because I've painted them so many times. Also, my friend and well-known illustrator Dave Seeley lives on the other side of that wall and up one floor!

If I'm by myself, it's easy for me to become demotivated or let the doubts in my head take over. Having studio space at the school keeps me much more focused and productive. I not only want to set an example, but I want to prove to the students and myself that I'm worthy of everything they invest here. I also think it's important for students to see how the things they learn in academic studies applies to more creative, conceptual and/or imaginative work.

My studio may seems small for a professional artist, but I do have the rest of the school to use if I need space for making canvases. About half of my still-life objects are at the studio, but I also have an entire apartment filled with knick-knacks, much to my husband's delight. The easels are set up so that my centre easel never moves, but I can either have photo reference or a model stand to the left and at least one sight-size still-life set up on the right. I like to work on multiple things going at different stages. Some days I feel like drawing, other days I feel like painting, and other times I feel like throwing everything out the window. Good thing the windows don't open!

Julie spent 10 years being a graphic designer and credits her husband Tim for giving her the confidence to become a professional artist. See her art at www.juliebcreative.com.


This oil painting, They That Sow the Wind, is special to me in many ways. There's personal content and narrative going on, but I also felt that I hit a new level of technical ability here.

It was impossible to work from life for this, so I had to invent the colour scheme for Not My Circus.

Having different lighting options for different set ups is important to me. The soft-box gives me a cool daylight effect with soft shadows, whereas the clamps lights have warmer light with sharper shadows.

This box floats around the studio. It's filled with a random assortment of still-life objects from past and for future paintings.

I'm drawn towards tall, thin images, but here I explored symmetry. The title is pulled from a Tarot card reading: King of Cups, Reversed.

Originally inspired by William Merritt Chase's painting The Leader, this is a portrait of one of my students. The piece is called Red Hand, Green Thumb.

I have a problem with buying paint brushes. This isn't all of them. I'm also a huge fan of New Wave palettes.

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An idea with bags of potential

Travel bags We talk to the team behind the Nomad Art Satchel, who are back with more storage products that will help plein air artists 'sketch painlessly anywhere'

"As a professional concept artist, I was tired of being desk bound in my art study, so I set out to create something that would help me get out and about working with my materials" says Darren Yeow , co-founder of Etchr Lab and CEO of the company.

This frustration lead to Darren launching the original Nomad Art Satchel on Kickstarter back in 2014. Following a successful campaign that raised over $100,000 from backers, as well as glowing praise from the art community, Darren's back with bigger ambitions.

"Founding Etchr Lab in early 2017 marked the evolution of the Nomad Art Satchel," says co-founder **Simon Frisby**. "We now have a team of four across Australia and the US, and we lean on the expertise of a few other special individuals from time to time."

This pool of talent has helped create two new products: the Etchr Art Satchel, and Field Case. These bags aim to make it easier for artists to get out into the world and starting being creative, and build on the success of the Nomad Art Satchel. "We've been seeking input from well-known artists as well as our own community of followers, and we've spent a bunch of time out in the field putting our gear to the test," says Simon.

The result is a pair of products with more space, better storage and durability to help facilitate more art in the world. With a Kickstarter launched in August and delivery due before Christmas, you can learn more about the Etchr Art Satchel and Field Case on its site: **www.etchrlab.com**.

The new Field Case features built-in storage for a laptop and drawing tablets. It's waterproof, too.

The Field Case easily doubles as a table if there are none nearby.

The smaller Etchr Art Satchel makes the most of its compact design.

Expandable front pockets inside the Field Case are capable of holding all sorts of painting tools.

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Never too late

I've been a subscriber since 2015 and you've been such an inspiration for me! So much of an inspiration in fact, that you've made me seriously think about making a living out of my illustrations. It's probably not the most sane thing to try and do at the age of 45 but, well, sanity is sometimes overrated, don't you think?

Anyway, please keep on making your wonderful magazine. Every month I eagerly wait to receive it! I've attached my latest two digital works. If you would like to see more; please visit **www.erikvanwijk-art.nl**.

Erik van Wijk, via email

ImagineFX has inspired reader Erik to try and make a career out of digital art. Here's one of his latest pieces.

Claire replies Sanity is indeed overrated! But it's not insane to follow your dreams. You're a young man, so you should put yourself and your art out there to see what comes back. Good luck!

Affinity with others

I've been very interested in your recent workshops on alternative painting programs like Rebelle, ArtRage and Sketchbook Pro. I have all of them plus Photoshop CS6 and Painter 2017. They all have their good points. I tend to use Sketchbook Pro and Clip Studio Paint for line art and alternate between Photoshop and Painter for painting.

I've been experimenting with Clip Studio and Sketchbook Pro painting, and I've tried Rebelle and Artrage, but have recently stumbled on Affinity Photo and really like it. The interface is easy to use, it has many features on a par with Photoshop, and the brushes and textures feel great. Painter 2017 is starting to feel slow and buggy on my 2009 MacPro and I'm not going to subscribe to Photoshop after paying Adobe for 20 years, So I need something like Affinity Photo and Designer to act as my primary software.

I'd really appreciate a beginner's guide or Core Skills series on it, and your thoughts on the whole matter of alternatives to the big hitters.

Bruce Kaiser, via email

Here's Affinity Photo in action, which has tickled the creative tastebuds of Bruce, a reader from New York.

Claire replies Bruce, thank you for your suggestions. Photoshop is the go-to software for most professionals, so it's easy for us to only provide workshops on this subject. Your email is a good reminder for us to keep branching out into other areas.

Priceless!

I just wanted to say well done and thank you for yet another fantastic issue. I hadn't noticed the price rise, but it's worth every penny. ImagineFX is unique in that it doesn't feel like it's trying to sell you something, like so many other magazines. It's a title that always gives: it's chock full of great artists and industry tips, inspiration from all over the planet, women being fairly represented, Artist in Residence (always my fave) and then you get great little pieces like the one on mindfulness. ImagineFX, long may you reign. You are priceless!

Holly Elmhirst, via email

Claire replies Thanks Holly! The only thing we want to sell to people is inspiration – and that in itself has no price. We do try to give you articles that not only inspire, but also get you thinking about how you can engage with your art or even others in a better way. Please let us know how we can improve. We learn with every edition and can only get better if people like yourself email in with suggestions and feedback. PS Artist in Residence is my fave as well – I'm still reeling from Coro's art barn in issue 152!

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Artist Q&A

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The ImagineFX panel

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

Houston Sharp

US-based Houston is a concept artist and illustrator who's worked on films such as Wonder Woman, Rampage and X-Men: Dark Phoenix.
http://ifxm.ag/h-sharp

Robert Kim

Robert's a freelance artist and instructor at Talent Tree, a Toronto-based digital painting and concept art school in Ontario, Canada.
www.roburii.com

Belinda Leung

Previously a lead artist in games, Belinda is now a freelance illustrator/concept artist in England who specialises in designing for films and games.
www.belindaleung.com

Question

How can I utilise 3D tools for a 2D illustration?

Tesha Calhoun, Canada

Answer

Houston replies

There are multiple ways to use 3D to produce artwork. Some artists create a highly detailed model and render it with beautiful lighting setups to achieve an image with little to no painting. But since I'm a painter, I prefer using 3D to help me solve tricky issues in a 2D piece, usually regarding extreme camera angles, challenging perspective, or when there are a lot of objects in a scene.

In other words, I use 3D to create my own references for paintings, the way an oil painter might hire models or build a maquette. An added benefit of creating artwork in this way is that the drawing/planning stage is essentially complete once you figure it out in 3D; simply paint on top of a render of screenshot of your base model instead of a pencil drawing.

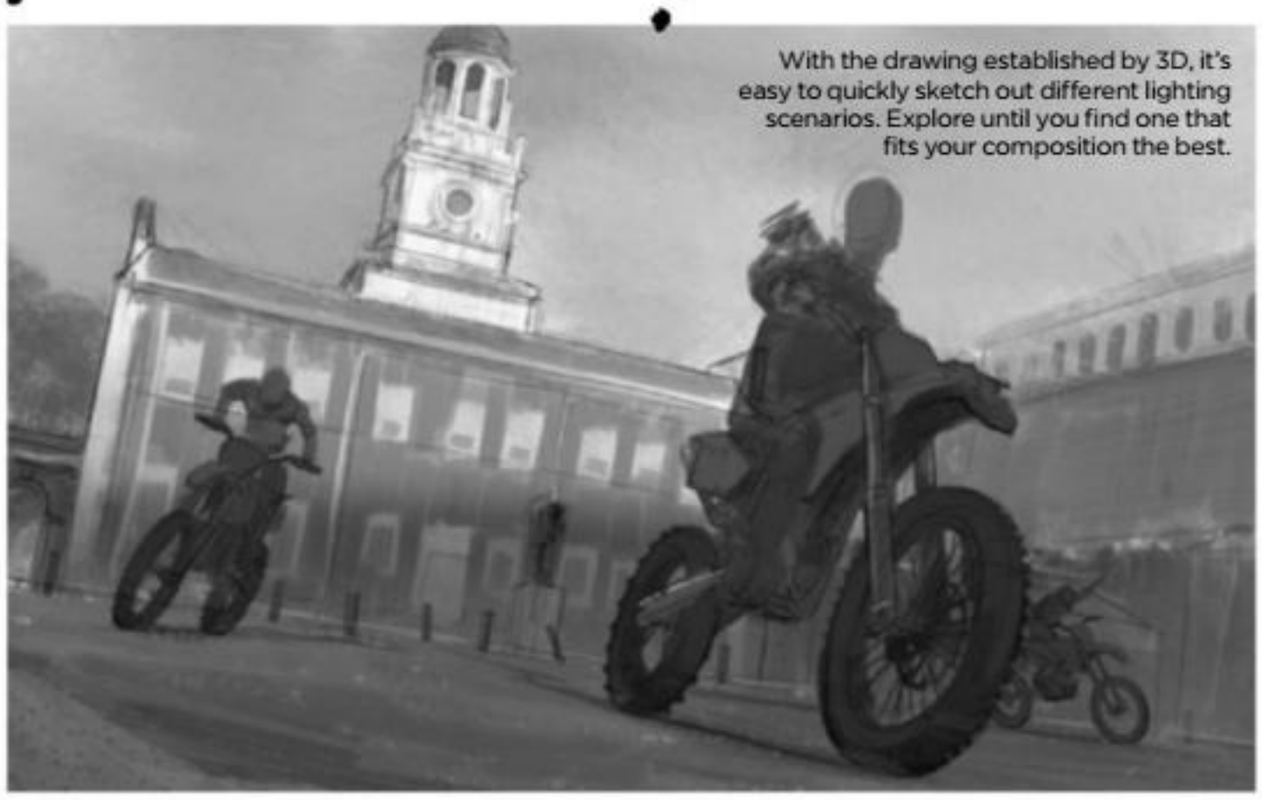
Using 3D also enables you to very quickly test out multiple camera angles and compositions. Once you have your scene blocked out, it takes only a second to shift the camera to a new position.

Artist's secret

Take advantage of the software's capabilities

Your use of 3D doesn't have to stop at establishing a composition or solving a tricky perspective issue. Set up some lights in your scene for instant lighting reference, or assign different materials to different parts of your model!

Artist Q&A
Need our advice?
Email **help@imaginefx.com** with your art questions and we'll provide all the answers!



With the drawing established by 3D, it's easy to quickly sketch out different lighting scenarios. Explore until you find one that fits your composition the best.

By building a simple 3D scene, many complications normally faced through drawing or painting are bypassed.

Step-by-step: Using a 3D composition as a base for your painting stage

1 Before jumping into your 3D software, identify what you're working towards. Sketch out your idea, trying to get the best composition. Establishing what you want at this stage will inform what exactly you'll need 3D for, and what can be left to painting.

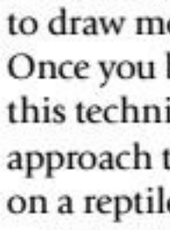
2 From my sketch I know I want a low, wide-angle camera, with a lot of perspective convergence and complicated objects. To save time, I jump to 3D, downloading a free dirt bike model, duplicating it, and using cubes for the background building.

3 Now that all the components are in the scene, I adjust the camera to match my sketch. From there I render out a PSD, and use it as my underdrawing. All the difficult things like perspective and lens distortion are quickly taken care of.

Question
What's a good technique for painting realistic-looking wings?

Jiang Li Lai, Scotland

Answer
Robert replies



Painting wings or anything that has repeating patterns can be made easier if you approach it in a systematic way. The key is to block out the broad shapes first, then use a smaller brush to draw more specific details on top. Once you become comfortable with this technique you can use the same approach to tackle things like scales on a reptile or details on tree trunks.

The first thing to do whenever you're trying to achieve more realism is to study references from real life and try to extract out the underlying pattern that make up the subject that you're analysing. A bird's wing can be broken down into more general shapes that the feathers are arranged on top of. Remembering this will ensure you don't become lost in all the intricate details that you see in real-life references.

In addition, consider the overall shift in value that exists on the wing, which should take priority over the smaller details on individual feathers.

By understanding the underlying pattern of a structure you can tackle complex subjects like feathers on a wing with confidence and efficiency.

Applying Color Dodge can make an image pop by adding a luminous quality to the subject that you're painting. Try it out!

Artist's secret
Having fun with blending modes

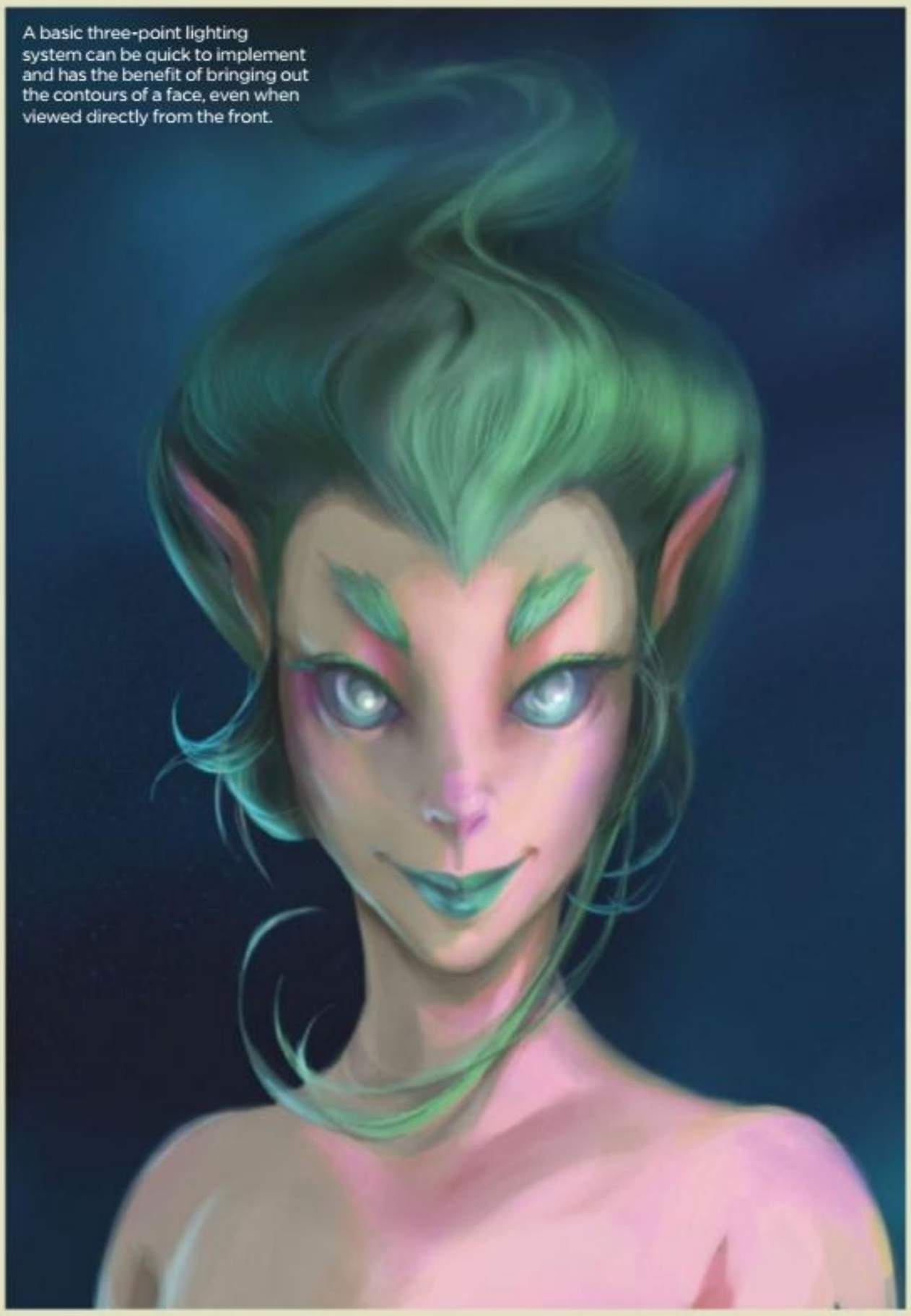
One of my favourite ways to add highlights is using Photoshop's Color Dodge blending mode. This option can be turned on either through one of the layer tabs or in the brush property tab. Combine this with the default airbrush to add highlights that make your wing really pop.

Step-by-step: Capture the shape of a bird's wing

1 Block out the general shape and colour of the wing using the airbrush. Within the shape, apply the overall shift in value and colour. Don't worry about the small details at this stage: only try to capture the bigger, broader shapes first. I suggest working while zoomed out.

2 Start laying down the patterns. Once you've established the general value and colour you can take a more specific brush to draw out the feather pattern. Use the Color Picker to follow the guideline you established in the previous stage, to maintain the overall shift in value.

3 Apply cast shadow and highlights Identify the spots where the feathers would create cast shadow and drop in some darker tones. Erase the soft edges from previous step to solidify the silhouette. Finally, draw in highlights with lighter tones to accentuate the forms.



A basic three-point lighting system can be quick to implement and has the benefit of bringing out the contours of a face, even when viewed directly from the front.

Question

Can you suggest a quick technique for lighting a fantasy character?

Hayden Bowen, Australia

Answer

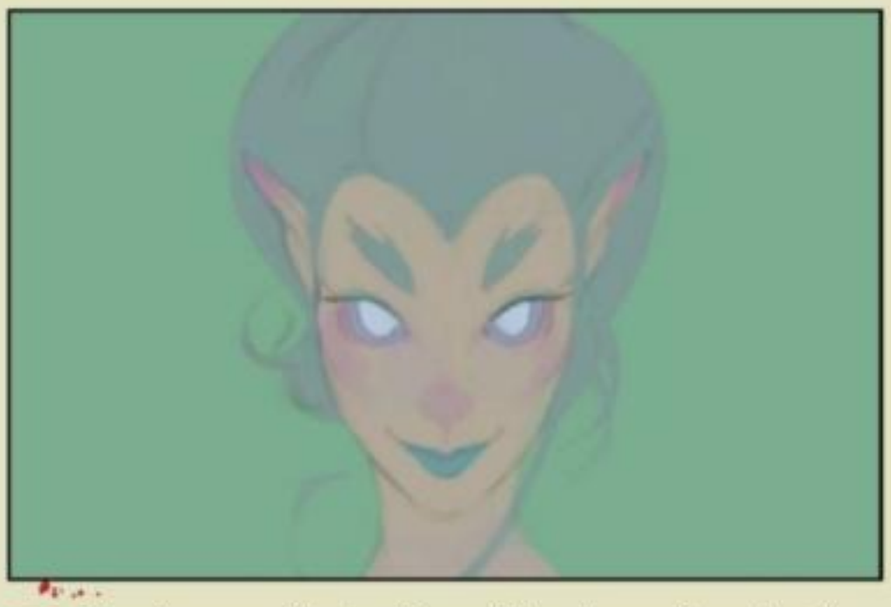
Belinda replies

When in need of a quick lighting solution for presenting a character, I like to use a three-point set up that effectively brings out the forms and the silhouette.

This starts off with the main key light, which sets the overall tone of the image. Next is the fill light, which lightens up the area in shadow enough to bring up the details. And finally there's the back light, which lights up the edge of the character to reveal the silhouette.

As this is a method I often turn to when I need to present a character quickly, I'll keep each of these "lights" on separate adjustment layers so I can tweak anything if necessary, such as the angle and colour of each light, to the design of the character and background. The idea is to stay as flexible as possible so you can accommodate any client changes by making non-destructive changes.

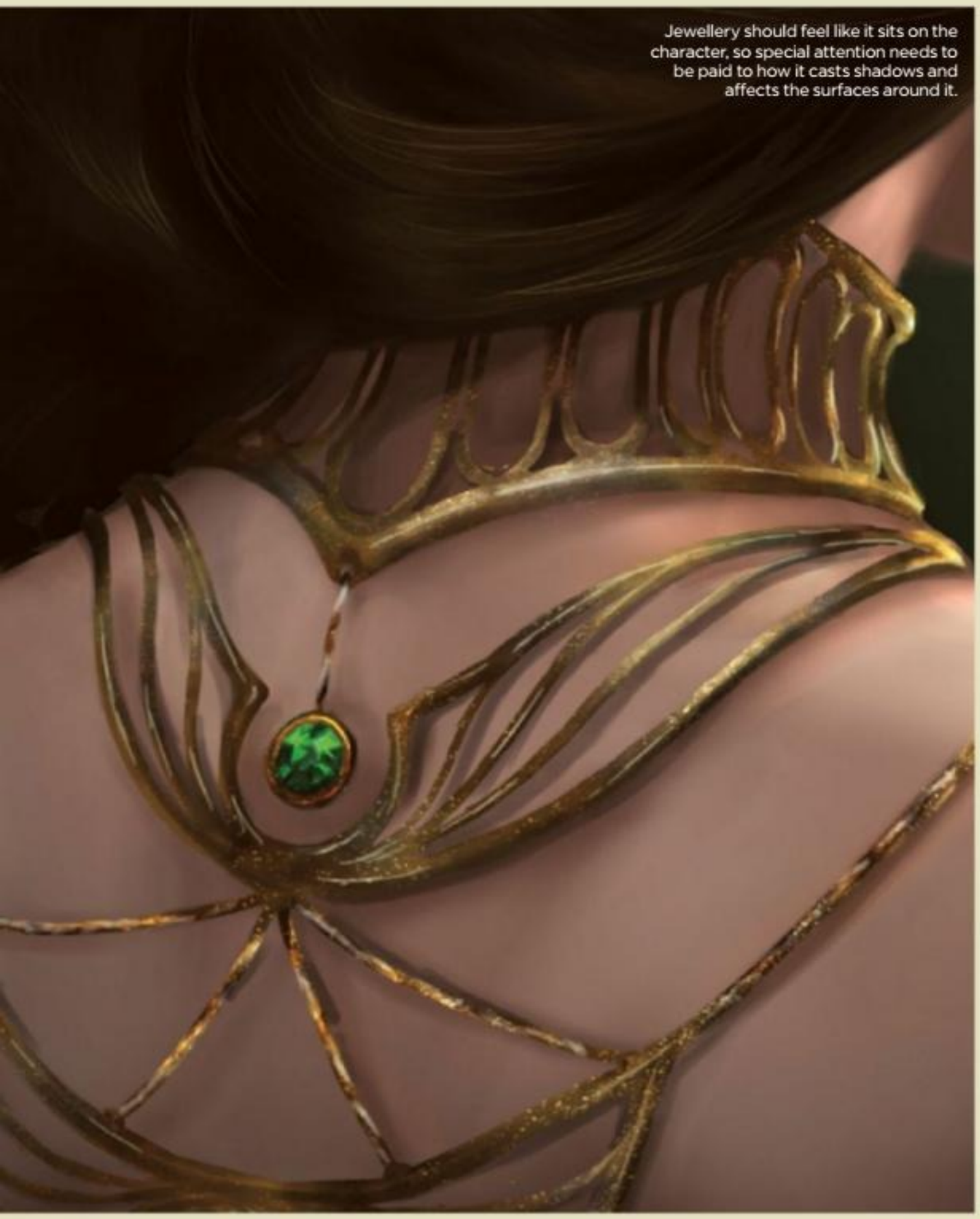
Step-by-step: Put together a simple lighting scheme in Photoshop



1 Starting my illustration with a loose line sketch, followed by the local colours enables me to focus on the design as opposed to painting form and values. To add to the lighting challenge, I decide to give this nymph opalescent white eyes!

2 Next I add the key light, cast from the right to show the contours of the face. I use a mixture of adjustment layers set to Saturation and Overlay so that I can add some colour effects while maintaining the local colours that I painted previously.

3 I then add the fill light from the left to bring out the form of the shadowed side, while a blue rim light coming in from the bottom left simulates the back-light. I adjust the background colour and value to complement the colours of the character.



Jewellery should feel like it sits on the character, so special attention needs to be paid to how it casts shadows and affects the surfaces around it.

Question

Got any tips for painting jewellery?

Leon Möller, Germany

Answer

Belinda replies

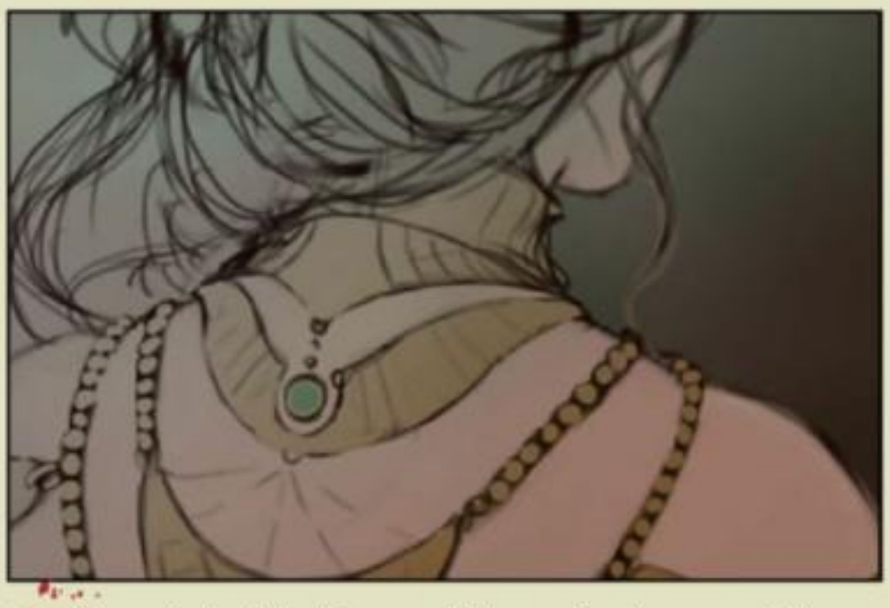
Jewellery and accessories can imbue a sense of culture, status and taste in a character, giving them added personality and depth. However, it can require an extra layer of research into materials and added care to make the objects believable while sitting on the character correctly.

In this painting, I decide to go with a decorative gold filigree necklace that's simple and delicate to suggest femininity and a certain amount of wealth and glamour. To keep things interesting, I design most of the details on the fly and went with what felt right, instead of prescribing too much from the beginning.

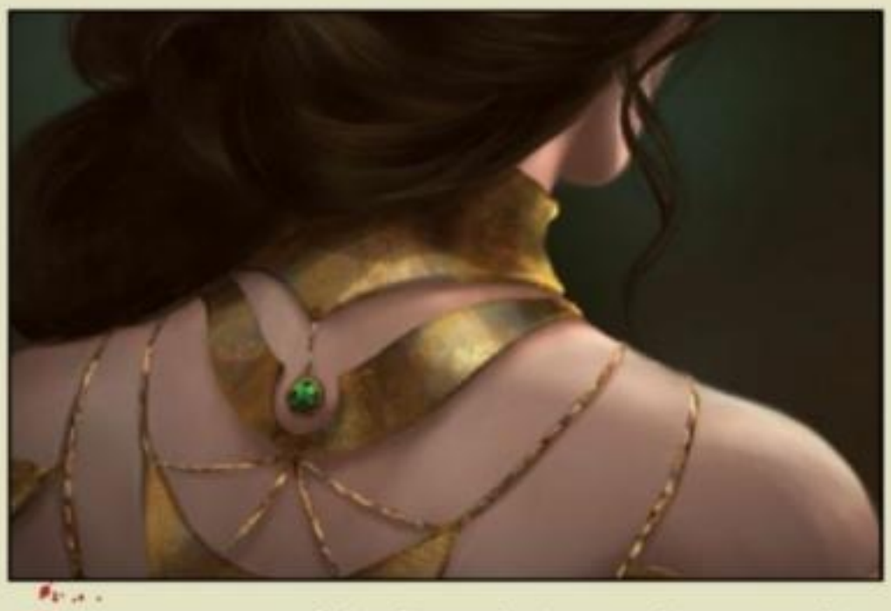
Working on separate layers and using adjustment layers enables you to experiment as you go. I also find it useful to start off with big overall shapes that are lit correctly, before carving in finer details. This means I can duplicate the layers and create various iterations of the detail within the shapes, and ensure I don't have to spend too much time rendering lighting on each version.

Step-by-step:

Draw and light a delicate piece of gold jewellery



1 I begin by blocking out the main shapes of the piece of jewellery, starting with a line drawing that then gets filled with the main local colours. I use a dark greenish background, which relates to the green of the jewel I plan to set into the jewellery.



2 I want some of the finer chains to glisten, so this requires some sharp contrasts between light and dark along the surface of the material. I use adjustment layers to test out various lighting schemes set them to Color Dodge or Multiply.

3 Once I'm happy with the lighting on the sheets of material, I duplicate the layer a few times and start trying out a few filigree design combinations. I use a layer mask to allow for any mistakes and once I'm happy, I add more cast shadows to the skin.

Question

I'm having trouble pushing scale in a composition – can you help?

Eula Blackman, US

Answer

Houston replies

Toying with scale boils down to two components: actual size difference between two or more things; and perceived scale, which we can evoke in a viewer through our compositional choices. With the first component, we can make something feel big by making its internal shapes or the things around it small. If we only have really large and really small (no medium-sized shapes or details), that difference in size will be more evident to us, pushing the scale.

For example, if you draw a large rectangular building, it may look fairly big already. But if all of its windows are drawn extremely small, the building will feel much more massive, like a skyscraper.

Juxtaposing large, overall shapes with minuscule details makes this undead orangutan feel large compared to his immediate setting, and the world he inhabits larger still.

As for the perceived scale, we can position the audience to "feel" a certain way about the scale of an object. In a film, when we see the big, intimidating bad guy, a common technique is to place the camera low so that we have to look up at him, even if the character is a normal-sized human. He seems bigger because of how he's presented.

Artist's secret

Reinforce your ideas

Repetition is key to reinforcing a design. I don't just apply these scale-pushing techniques to my main point of interest; I repeat them all over, including on the unimportant towering buildings in the background. This boosts the massive scale of the world within this painting.

Step-by-step: Boost scale via size relationships and composition

1. I start thinking about how to make the undead orangutan feel massive right from the start. So I choose a low camera angle, and establish the size of the temple in relation to him. I also place him higher in the frame than the human. This falls under the "perceived scale" approach.

2. For emphasising size differences, I keep the details of things small in relation to their large overall shapes. Notice how tiny the orangutan's eye's and mouth are in relation to the big silhouette of his body. This principle is also applied to the temple's openings and broken stones.

3. Although not completely necessary, having some recognisable objects can be a useful reference point to see how big or small something else is. Adding trees with tiny leaves and thin branches helps to make the other elements feel large, heavy and imposing.

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Question

How can I paint clouds to look more natural?

Sophie Fraser, England

Answer

Robert replies

I'm sure that you've already discovered there are many different approaches to painting clouds. However, I'll share with you my preferred method of doing it.

Trying to paint clouds from real-life reference can be a challenge because there are a lot of small details that are difficult to recreate by hand without spending a great deal of time and effort. I've found that the key is to simplify what you see in real life into basic shapes and pattern that you can then use to capture the essence of the form without having to express every little detail.

Clouds can be difficult to paint correctly because they must be treated as if there are solid forms that reflect light, while also being gaseous formations that enable light to pass through where the cloud is less dense. To achieve the right 'feel' of clouds you must learn to shift in and out of painting a solid and gaseous form seamlessly. This will take practice!

Once you get the hang of the general pattern you can use the same technique to paint all kinds of cloud formations and add a dramatic feel to your environment scenes.

Using these type of brushes it's possible to paint all kinds of cloud formation. Make a note of the general pattern that's used to express the forms.

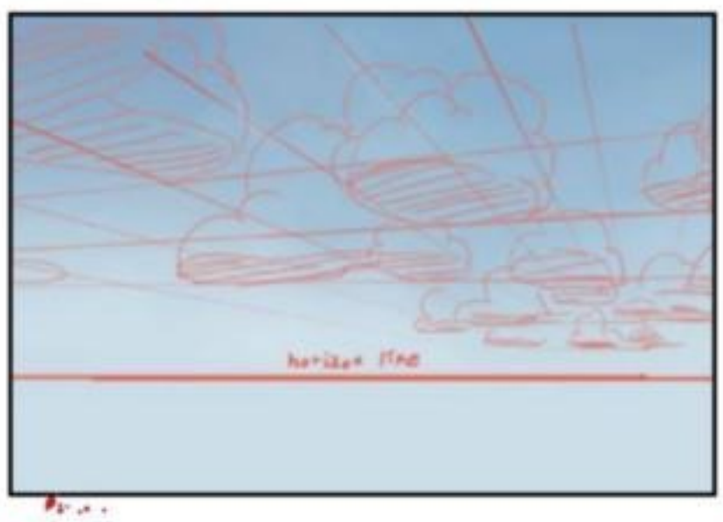
Using an airbrush and a texture brush, you can capture the essence of the cloud formation through simplified shapes and brush patterns.

Artist's secret

Use a texture brush to save yourself time

Textured brushes are better suited for painting clouds than the default brush in Photoshop. I use texture brushes that can blend colours easily, but also has shape that mimics the edge of the clouds to make it look more natural in less time.

Step-by-step: Illustrate clouds realistically



1 Establish a perspective grid. Clouds are 3D forms that should follow the scene's perspective line. Clouds typically travel along the same plane level, so they should line up on a single perspective plane. Treat the clouds as if they are solid objects with top, bottom and side planes.

2 Use an airbrush to block out the shape of the clouds very loosely. Keep in mind which direction the sun is shining to keep the lighting and cast shadow consistent. Start erasing away the edges to shape the silhouette and use the texture brush to define the inner forms.

3 Define the form to finish. Using a texture brush, look for areas within the blocked-out shapes where you can drop some darker tones as well as brighter highlights to increase the contrast level. Clouds that are further away from you will have less contrast than closer ones.

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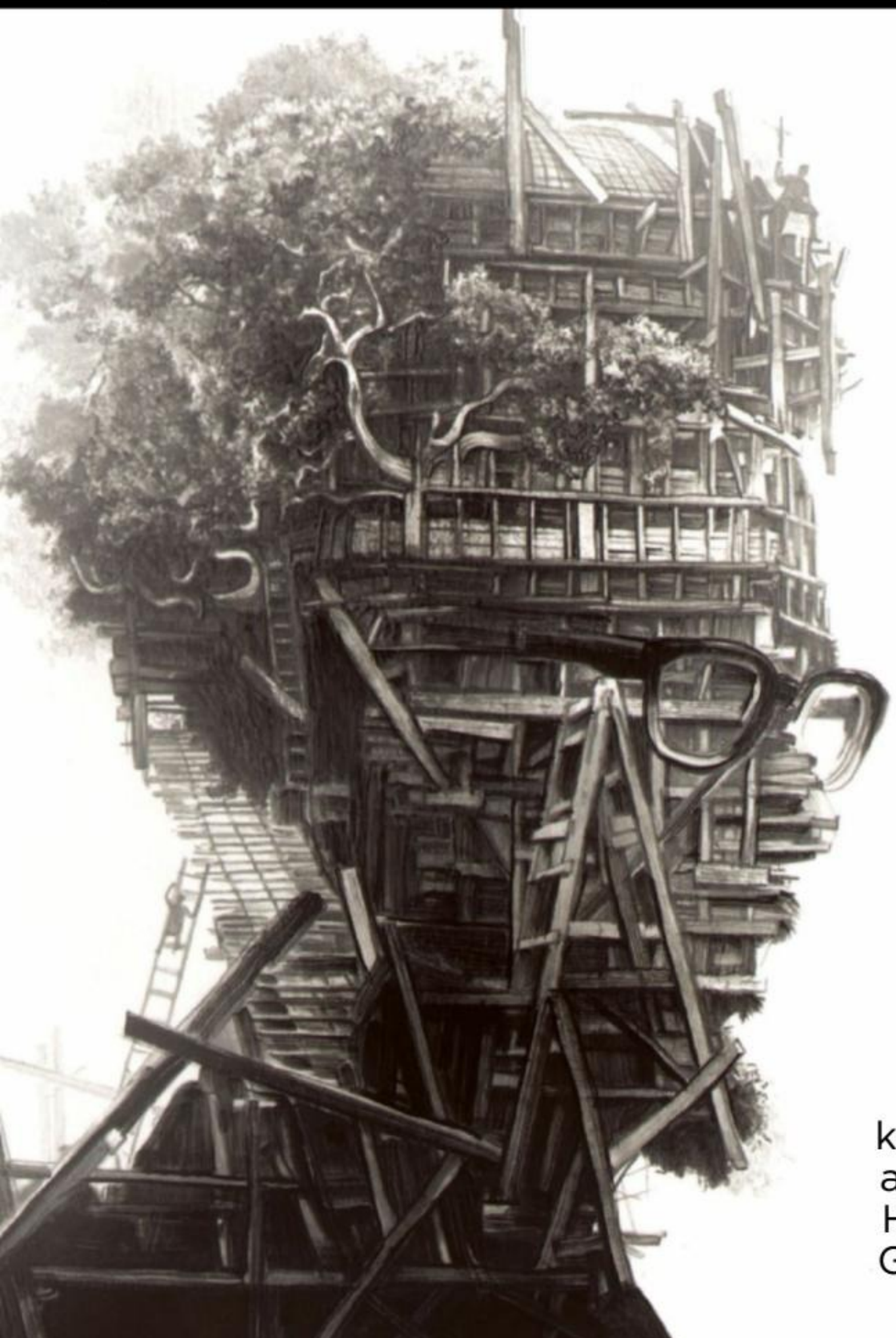


Artist Portfolio

GREG RUTH

A music video with Prince, a kids' book with Barack Obama and graphic novels with Ethan Hawke: **Gary Evans** steps into Greg Ruth's star-studded world

Houston, Texas, was a city obsessed with three things: sports, money and guns. Greg Ruth tried to fit in. As a boy, he'd go to football games. He liked to critique the "outfits" and would ask fellow attendees which team they thought had the coolest team badge, or the neatest helmet design. They answered him with blank stares.

Watching other people play games was "epically dull", so his mind would wander. He thought about nuclear war, laser blasters and falling in love with women from outer space. Back at home, a shag carpet became a furry space beast on which GI Joe figures acted out sprawling melodramas. He read Raymond Chandler, Ray Bradbury, the Dune series by Frank Herbert and pulp novels, and he liked big band music. He watched B-movies and Star Trek reruns, and Abbott and Costello marathons. He spent much of his childhood withdrawing into an imagined world – a skill that he'd use in adulthood to build a career as an artist.

"I hid from Texas," he says. "I didn't belong in the nest into which I was hatched. So ➳➳

© Greg Ruth and Ethan Hawke

INDEH AUTHOR PORTRAITS

"Ethan Hawke and I thought it'd be cool to do drawn author portraits. This was part of a collaborative series with the photographer Allan Amato. He'd take their portrait and then we'd paint over the picture."

Artist Portfolio

A TOUCH OF ZEN POSTER

"My original approach, a Frank Miller-type composition, didn't fit Dragon Inn as a film, so I pushed more to focus on the female lead."

© Criterion Collection and Greg Ruth

SUPEREGO-EGOID
"I count this as a symbolist image of myself, rather than a self-portrait. I think this was only my second graphite piece."

AGATHA'S MIRROR
"One of my favourite pieces. It was for a short story entitled Dragonkin. It got left because it skewed a bit too young for the story inside. It's tough when you have to reject a good piece despite its merits."

art became the other world into which I could flee to safety, until I was able to actually flee."

A FREAKY CONAN

Greg fled to Brooklyn and attended the Pratt Institute, an art and design school, where he tried architecture and fine art, before finally establishing himself as a comic book artist.

He now lives in Massachusetts, and recently created a comic with Ethan Hawke, but previous to this, a music video with Prince and a picture book with Barack Obama. Greg works on film art and book covers, and wrote his own New York Times bestselling graphic novel. He also created a new, weekly, self-initiated illustration, which became The 52 Weeks Project.

Greg's busy. Working across so many different disciplines can pose problems. He once drew two comics simultaneously for Dark Horse, both 22 pages, the final issue of Freaks of the Heartland and the first issue of Conan: Born on the Battlefield. The workload alone was tough, but tougher still was the clash of genres.

© Greg Ruth and Steve Niles

FREAKS OF THE HEARTLAND
"This was my first collaborative full-length graphic novel with Steve Niles. It was a sparse script that let me rush in and fill every corner, and a defining book for my time in comics."

With Freaks, Greg knew the story inside out – what he describes as a classic small-town gothic-horror story. He'd established a colour palette, a narrative rhythm. Conan, on the other hand, was a pulpy adventure book, garish and raucous in every way. For the first issue of Conan, he tried a Freaks-style approach. It didn't work: "Sometimes when you're making breakfast and dinner at the same time, you end up with pot-roast omelettes and fresh jam on your asparagus. It

"I didn't belong in Texas. Art became the other world into which I could flee to safety"

ZATOICHI
"Criterion wanted me to contribute to the Zatoichi box set. I did about a dozen Sumi ink portraits, from which this was chosen as the final."

© Criterion

Artist PROFILE

Greg Ruth
LOCATION: US
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Edward Kinsella, Karla Ortiz, Kent Williams, Dave McKean and Jon J Muth
MEDIA: Blackwing, Palomino, Pearl and 504, Prismacolor pencils, Sumi ink and Photoshop
WEB: www.gregthings.com

MAPPING THE INTERIOR

"A seriously rough short story came in from Tor, which is a real knife's edge to walk in terms of what to depict, but Indeh gave me the confidence to take a swing at it."

INDEH BATTLE SKULL CAVE

"One of the first big sort of adventure-epic attempts with graphite. Ethan Hawke and I wanted to tell a different story than the usual us-against-them battles that dominate stories of white settlers invading tribal lands. But violence aplenty happened."

LAGOON 2

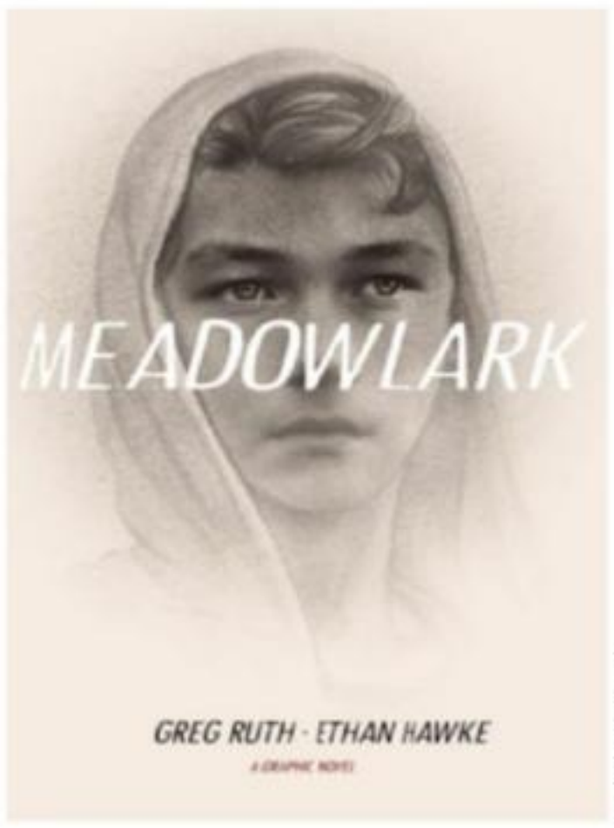
"I've done seven or eight covers for Nnedi Okorafor in various editions of her books. Lagoon was my first and a real breakthrough moment in pushing the boundaries of what graphite could do."

© Greg Ruth and Ethan Hawke

DAREDEVIL FOR MONDO
"This one was a total lark. I just woke up one day and had this exact image in my head, drew it, posted it and it went wild, surprisingly. Mondo got in touch about doing a print and had this cool idea about using red paper."
DAREDEVIL
MARVEL

CONAN
"Another cornerstone for me, this time with the estimable Kurt Busiek. Until Indeh, I learned more doing this series than any other as to what comics could and should do well."

© Dark Horse Comics



MEADOWLARK COVER
"This is a culmination project for myself and Ethan. We wrote it in between press events for Indeh, and it just took on a life of its own. We're now working on the script."

OLD TURTLE
"This was a doozy to do – much longer than typical kids' picture books, tricky to execute visually, and following on the heels of one of my idols, Jon J Muth, who'd done the previous Old Turtle book…"

© Scholastic Books

ain't so great. Nowadays, I have a better grasp of my own limitations."

Greg didn't find his groove until well into the second issue of Conan. So now, when working on a big job, he focuses on it entirely until the project begins "cruising on its own". He may take a book cover or some editorial work – particularly if one project complements the other in some way – but mostly he tries "not to cross the streams". He also likes to create a soundtrack for big graphic novels. This way, he can listen to music to help him get into the mood, tone and themes of the narrative. It's helpful if he does have to take a break to work on something else. "When I pop the soundtrack on, coming into work, I get right into the world of it." Some gigs, however, are just too good to turn down…

PRINCE THE CHEERLEADER

"Why would any human-shaped person say no to Prince?" Greg says. He helped create a video for the legendary musician in 2004 – one of his favourite ever jobs. He created the dark, moody world in which Prince and his band perform. When the money men got twitchy about some of the video's themes, Prince stepped in and funded the project with his own money. "Prince pretty much left us to go nuts on that," Greg says, "and was our biggest cheerleader and defender."

Not every client is like Prince. He made another music video for American singer-songwriter Rob Thomas, which was "much more of a corporate affair". His work in films – where some actors have the power to veto the posters he creates – can be equally restrictive. "The movie industry," Greg says, "likes to repeat what's proven to work, even if it's simply chasing diminishing returns or risking derivativeness."

Greg recently accepted a job to design the poster for Ethan Hawke's 2018 film Blaze. "Ethan let me go

"Prince pretty much left us to go nuts on that and was our biggest cheerleader and defender"

RENDERING SUDDEN GRAVITY

Greg describes his love-hate relationship with the humble ballpoint pen

"I insanely rendered my first graphic novel project, Sudden Gravity, in ballpoint pen. Ballpoint pen has a sketchy, almost pencil-like quality to it, depending on how hard you bear down on the paper. What became clear – far too late – was how much actual drawing such a book required and how insane it was to approach it with this method. Once you decide on a particular method of drawing for a graphic novel, you're married to it until the book is done. It just became increasingly tedious.

So when a scene came up where there was a kind of surrealistic dream sequence or vision, I took the opportunity to give myself a break and test out this new Sumi ink I'd found. I had no formal training in ink drawing, or dry brush work, so I basically just aped a lot of Kent Williams and Jon J Muth.

The result was such that when I had done the scene and had to return to the shackles of the ballpoint pen, I knew I would never use them again. When I finished Sudden Gravity, I immediately jumped into a kind of sequel project, The Calendar Priest, which never saw print, but was done entirely in Sumi ink and brush, and that changeover led to what I think was my career getting off the ground.

I think this was largely because there weren't a lot of people employing Sumi ink and brush work professionally, so I kind of won the field for a bit. It led directly into my first children's picture book with Barack Obama, Our Enduring Spirit, and the periodic drawing series that I still do today, called The 52 Weeks Project, as well as work for The Criterion Collection, and just about every graphic novel project I did that came after.

Only in the last year or so have I returned to the ballpoint pen ethos via graphite pencils, but now my approach is so much looser and softened by years of devoted Sumi ink work. It's a testimony to the need to push oneself out of normal bounds and try different tools and techniques. You simply cannot ever truly know how much of an impact that can have on your work and way of working. It literally reshaped my art-making landscape forever."

WELL, DAVID, YOU'RE IN NO CONDITION TO STOP --
NOT ME ... JULIUS... THE CHILDREN... ALL THAT I REMEMBER...
... LIKE BROKEN GLASS. PIECES... BITS...
THE BLACK EGGS, BONTICOU'S CHILDREN...
... JULIUS IS A CHILD WITH BOTH EYES, TO STAND IN BOTH WORLDS.
BONTICOU'S WIFE IS THE CONTACT. SHE'S WAITING FOR THE HEALER...
THE HALLERKREIGER ... IT'S YOU SUSAN. YOU ...
ALICE AND HENRY... ARE THE SAME.
SHADOW WARRIOR ...
THE SCHATTEN-KREIGER.
... VLADEK, HID THEM ... THE CHILDREN.
TILLARYS FOUND THEM... BONTICOU'S PEOPLE...
IT'S TONIGHT. FIRST CONTACT.
THE CRACK BETWEEN WORLDS.
... EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE, FOREVER.
127

SUDDEN GRAVITY

"Oh, boy. Kids, listen to your Uncle Greg and never, never, not ever take on a proposed 12-issue graphic novel epic – in ballpoint pen! I was nearly the youngest person alive with massive carpal tunnel syndrome."

VERY SLOW, METICULOUS AND TIME-CONSUMING

Greg explains why this technique to create smokey, spectral figures is well worth the effort

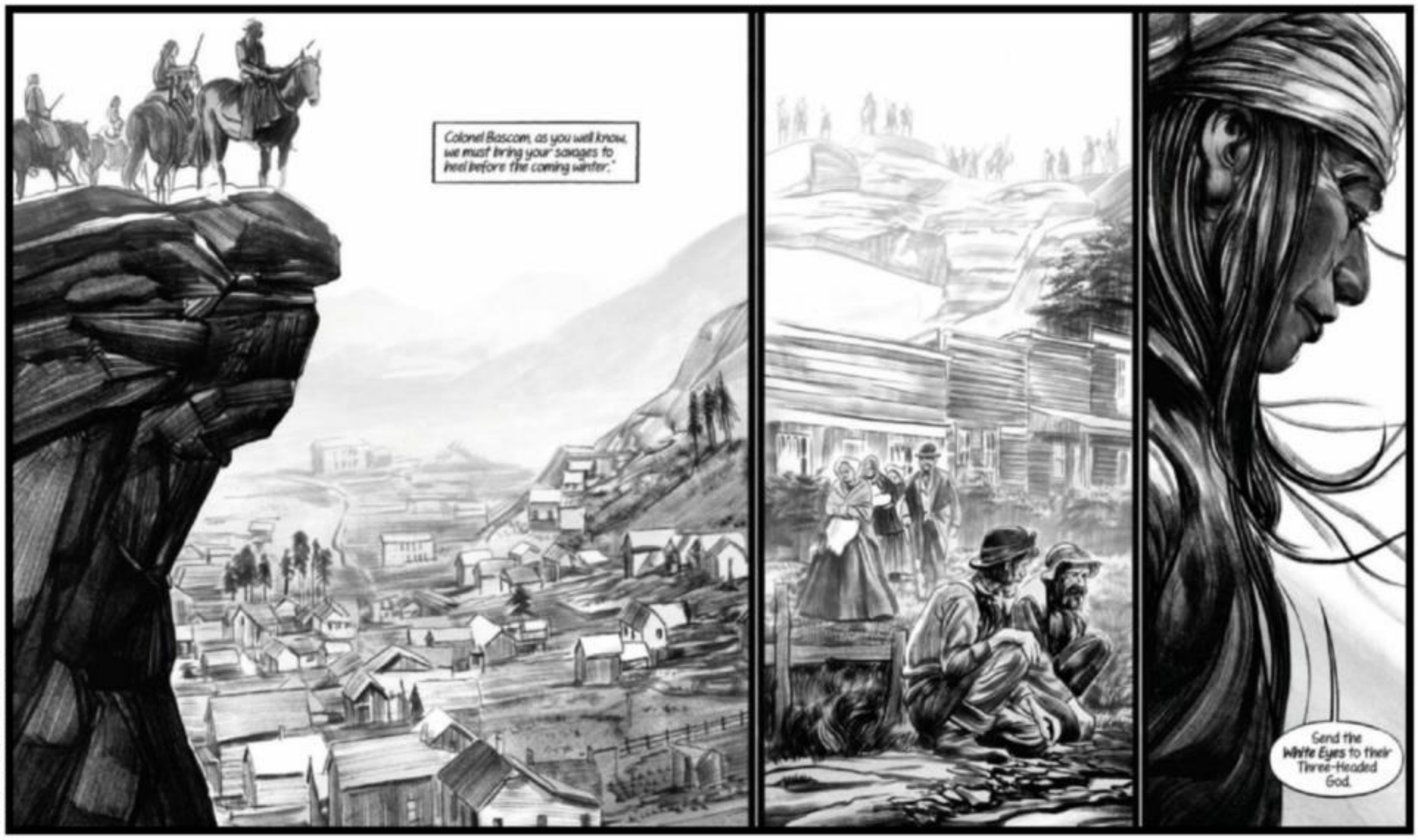
"This is a test sample for a forthcoming graphic novel about ghosts. I wanted to further explore a new smokey effect that I've been developing. I used graphite pencils, mostly Blackwing Palomino, but also Staedtler All X-Write, for the softer undertones. With my natural tendency to tighten up on the details, it was a challenge to see if I could somehow depict the fluidity of rising smoke.

I tend to be very immediate with my drawing, getting right down and dirty with a piece in full, but this kind of drawing required the kind of layering I used to deal with in painting. It took a light touch to map out the contrails of the smoke, how they move, rise and twist around objects and invisible air currents, before bearing down harder onto the specifics.

I wanted Flora's form to sort of emerge from the smoke, but also be part of it, so there's a need to illustrate both solid form and be true to the gossamer qualities of the spectral smoke she inhabits. A lot of the blending and defocusing came from a very light approach, vigorously rubbed into blurs, using my index finger. I later used an eraser to attack some of the hard edges of the smoke forms. I'll likely only use this technique for the cover as it's very time-consuming."

THIS IS FLORA

"This was the horse that lost the race against Meadowlark for my next graphic novel project – delayed but not forgotten. It's a portrait of Flora, one of the two main characters as I played around with the style of the book."


Colonel Bascom, as you well know, we must bring your savages to heel before the coming winter."
Send the White Eyes to their Three-Headed God.

© Greg Ruth and Ethan Hawke

crazy as I can," he says. They have a good working relationship. His current project is Meadowlark, his second graphic novel with the actor-director. While on a book tour for the first, Indeh, the pair tossed around ideas for scenes, images and characters, which grew into what's set to be an "epic crime melodrama".

Indeh worked the other way round. Ethan initially pictured it as a film, so the final story came from a 300-page script. "More an act of pruning than growing," Greg says.

"I kind of love the differences between the assignments. There's something really invigorating about tackling new ways of thinking and seeing, and it all dovetails nicely into my overall work ethic of always seeking to tackle projects that scare the shit out of me."

INDEH
"My favourite graphic novel and the hardest thing I've ever done, with a new creative partner I never expected to have. This book opened my eyes and changed my life."

© Greg Ruth and Ethan Hawke

INDEH LOZEN
"Ah, Lozen. She was one of our most favourite characters from this period and it felt like a terrific violence to have to cut much of her story from Indeh."

"It all dovetails nicely into my overall work ethic of always seeking to tackle projects that scare the shit out of me"

Greg wakes up at 5am and works until around 6pm, breaking in between to take his kids to school and bring them home again. There's the odd all-nighter here and there. But sticking to this routine helps Greg with his huge workload. "Inspiration or The Muse," he says, "comes more often if it knows where to find you."

DARKLY THINGS

Being so prolific has a practical purpose, too. Greg aims to be recession proof. If picture books are going through a slump, he has film work. If the movie work dries up then there are book covers. Having different sources of income also means that he's able to work on the graphic novels he really wants to work on.

Greg is currently developing a picture book, a script, more book covers, more movie posters, another graphic novel of his own, another 52 Weeks series… he's as busy as ever! But Greg doesn't like to overthink what it is that he's trying to achieve. Instead, he tries to remember who he's making art for in the first place.

"I honestly try to avoid over-analysing my work. I think this comes from being at Pratt and having that Clement Greenbergian, modernist bullshit crammed down my throat.

"The audience is, in many ways, everything. Not so much to serve their assumed desires, rather to try and force me into an outside perspective, so that whatever I'm doing lands and reads. You have to be both the fan and the creator."

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

Sketchbook

Chantal Horeis

Melancholy and gracefulness play a big part in the concepts and illustrations that feature in this video game artist's sketchbook

Artist PROFILE

Chantal Horeis
LOCATION: Germany

Chantal works as a concept artist and illustrator in the video game industry. She trained as a fine artist and likes to combine digital and traditional media such as pencil and watercolours to create mysterious, fantastical creatures and tell their stories.
www.chantalhoreis.de

SUDDEN QUEEN

"This is a portrait of a young princess who found herself queen overnight and felt overwhelmed by her new duties. I was inspired by the photograph of a girl, whose face I used as reference."

AND SUDDENLY I BEGAN TO SEE YOU

"I usually start with a very hard pencil, so that my lines are light and I can make changes where needed. After that I use a medium-soft pencil and finish with a very soft one to go as dark as needed. I also switch softness back and forth in the process."

WISE, WICKED, BEAUTIFUL

"A page from my sketchbook. I remember it was one of my first drawings. I dared to use my pencils to their full potential and went really dark in some areas."

TALKING TO GHOSTS

"This is the first sketch of a character created as part of a story that I still want to realise in some form. She's a ghost hunter who, ironically, finds herself haunted by a spirit that takes possession of people to reach her."

DON'T YOU DARE

"One of my first attempts to use my pencil drawings as a foundation to create a coloured piece in Photoshop. To me it's important not to overpaint the texture of the traditional base during the process."

> "To me it's important not to overpaint the texture of the traditional base"

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Sketchbook

DON'T LOOK BACK

"If you examine my drawings you may find that I like to draw eyes in different intensities on the same face. It's a conscious choice to do that. I think it gives more depth and complexity to a character."

WILDLING

"A quick portrait sketch of an Amazon kind of creature. I just love to put feathers, horns, big ears, wings, fins and fur on people – I can't help it!"

ROSE

"A quick sketch to experiment with graphite powder, which I ended up using in her hair. I like to apply graphite powder with a make-up blender to give my drawing some variation in texture where needed."

"I like to draw eyes in different intensities on the same face"

LITTLE ELF GIRL

"She's one of my favourites to this day as she combines all the elements that I love to draw. The painting even contains patterns on the snake skin. I love patterns! Plus, she's super cute. One day she's going to be an amazing elf lady, I'm sure."

ANGEL ON HOLD

"Her wings weren't growing as fast as she would want them to. She had to watch the other winged ones diving through the sky, waiting for her day to come."

MERMAIDS

"She wasn't here to watch them take away everything she loved. She would fight till her death and she had the advantage of being underrated. I like writing small story excerpts for my characters."

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Sketchbook

GLÜCKSKIND

"This is a German word, meaning 'child of fortune'. It's another sketch for a character I've had in my mind for a very long time. Her look has developed since I did this sketch but I still like the initial drawing."

HIDE AND SEEK

"Not all the pages in my sketchbook end up looking as successful as this one. I used a combination of pencils and graphite powder and I think it's successful because the lines are very expressive. Also, her face doesn't show a lot of detail but you can still read it."

> My creatures often have some sort of outgrowth on their heads

Sketchbook Chantal Horeis

A MIND FULL OF ROOTS

"My creatures often have some sort of outgrowth on their heads. It represents something majestic to me, like a crown. Yet, I often draw very organic structures, especially plants and roots."

Do you want to share your sketches with your fellow ImagineFX readers? Send us an email with a selection of your art, captions for each piece and a photo and bio of yourself to **sketchbook@imaginefx.com**

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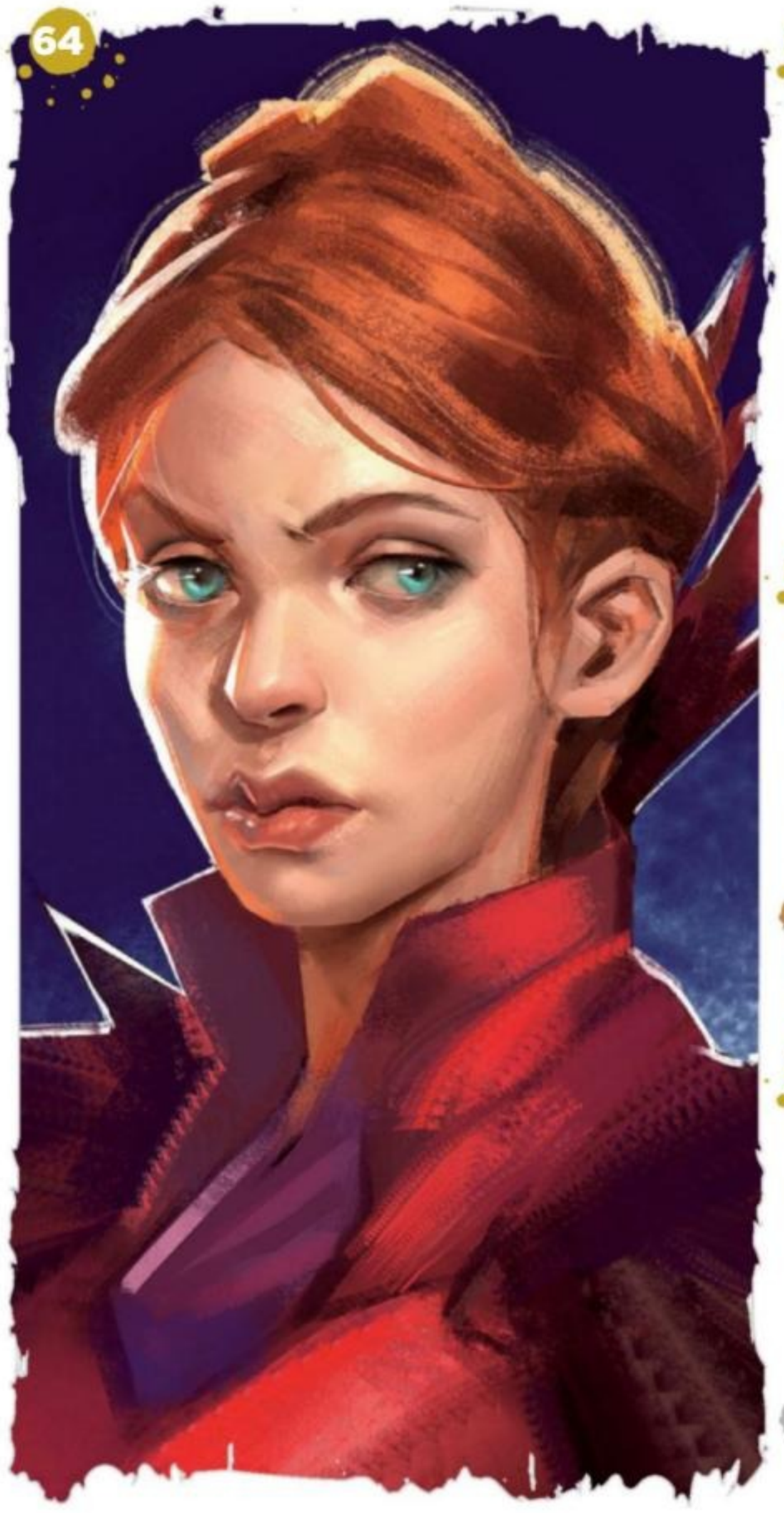
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

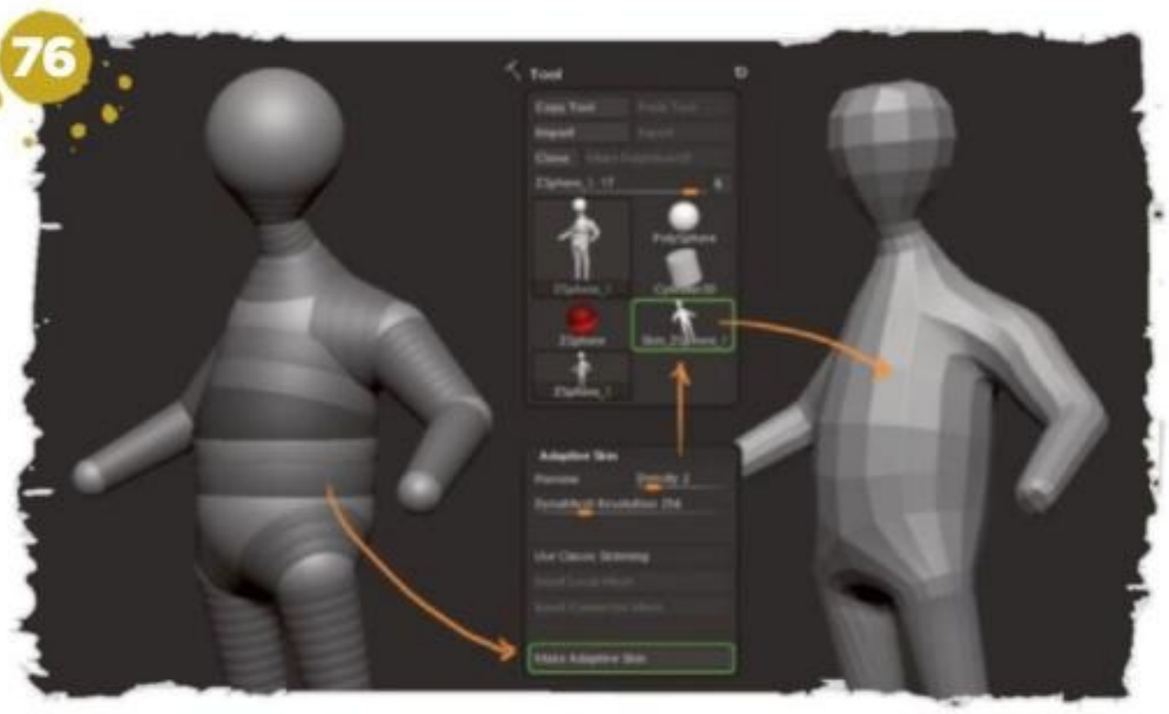
ImagineFX Workshops

Advice from the world's best artists

Workshops assets are available...

Download each workshop's WIPs, final image and brushes by turning to page 6. And if you see the video workshop badge, you can watch the artist in action, too.





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Tan Zhi Hui develops a male character with an intriguing concept, and unusual shapes and silhouette.

Artist insight

IMPROVE YOUR CHARACTER ART

Struggling to bring your original character concepts to life? Then you're in luck, as **Ramón Nuñez** is on hand to pass on his professional insights

Artist **PROFILE**

Ramón Nuñez
LOCATION: Spain

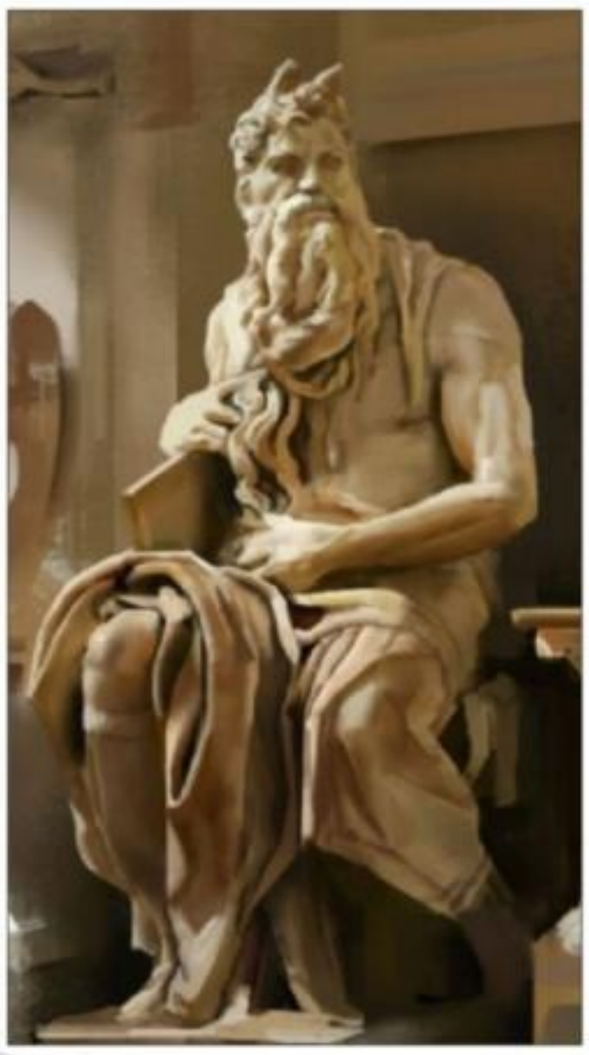
Ramón started as a graphic designer in Venezuela five years ago, but then began teaching himself concept art skills. After a period of low-key jobs and freelance commissions, his art career took off with work from companies such as Gameloft, Hex, Paizo and Image Comics. He's now illustrating for Riot Games.
http://ifxm.ag/r-nunez

In the years since leaving behind graphic design for concept art, I've discovered that my particular speciality is original character design.

When I'm tasked with creating an character from scratch I think about that figure's personality. I put myself in their mind set and identify their motivations, their talents and their ambitions. It's not just about drawing an interesting shape or a beautiful face. You need to inform the viewer of the stories behind that face. My goal is to ensure that a character's expression – even just their eyes – speaks volume about them.

While I hope that this workshop will prove helpful, bear in mind that the creative process is something personal. So even if you follow these tips to the letter, it doesn't mean that you'll find the perfect way to create something. Every artist has their own approach to the workflow, and I just want to show you mine. If you read something useful, find a way to adapt it to your own creative process rather than using it wholesale.

Something else that I've found out over the years: a disciplined approach towards self-improvement goes a long way. Yes, talent and classes help, but you can achieve so much just by staying focused on your goals.



1 GET INTO THE HABIT OF DRAWING

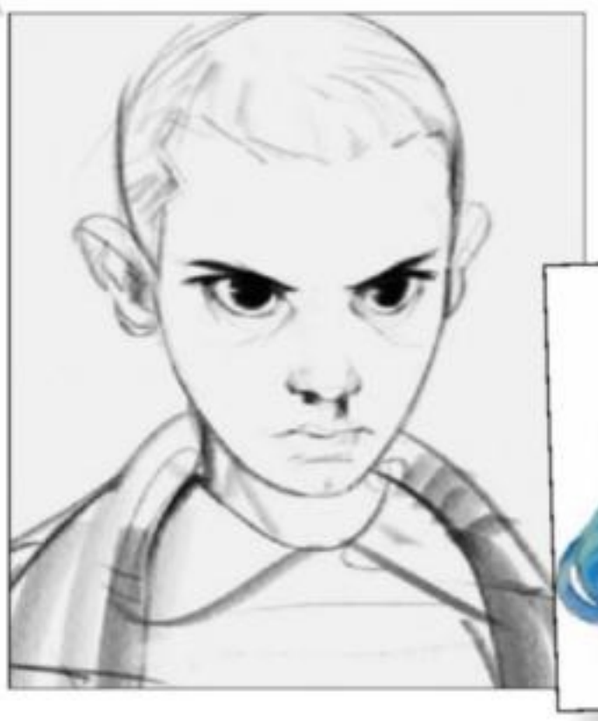
Drawing is a skill that will improve the more time you spend doing it. I advise picking a subject and then spending at least three hours depicting it. It's a great way to grasp the fundamentals of art: anatomy, composition, colour and values. Drawing statues helped me to learn about lighting and shading.

Study references for an hour, then try to draw them from memory. This will help to enrich the visual library on your brain. But don't waste time memorising small details. Instead, focus on the larger, geometric shapes, because these will be easier to remember. Don't make things hard for yourself!

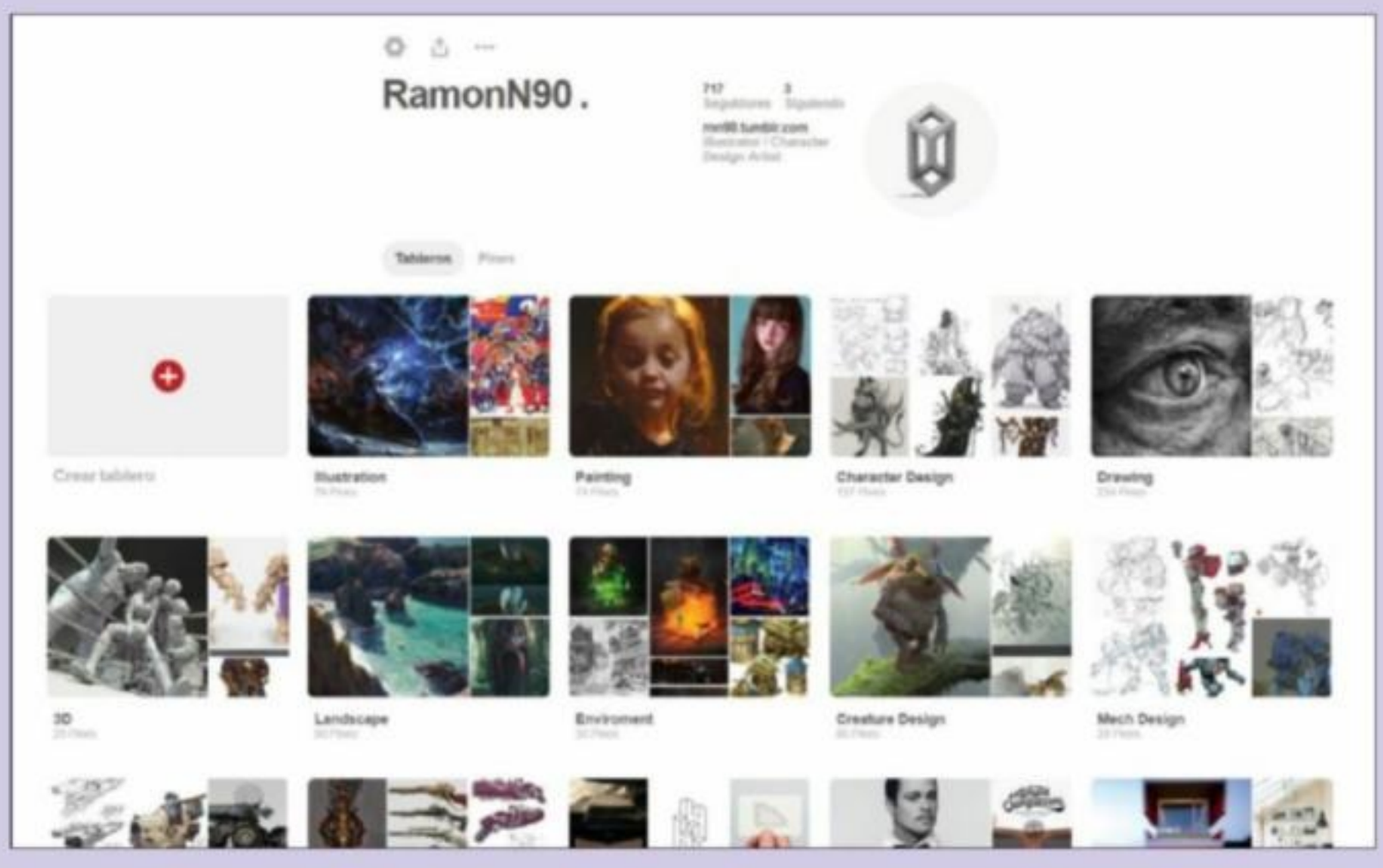
2 STUDY CHARACTERS FROM POP CULTURE

Books or films provide easy access to worlds that are full of inspiration and references. In particular, they'll be characters – all with different back stories – that will help you bring your own characters to life. I take a lot inspiration from films and animation.

For example, when I want to create an evil character I watch films that feature my favourite villains. Then I try to understand why they look creepy, scary or simply how they exude 'badness'! Maybe it's the eyes, smile or shape of the head? I take notes and then examine another villain. This approach helps me to build up my own bad guy. Draw up a list of characters from popular culture that you can dip into whenever you need to develop your own ideas.



> "I try to understand why characters look creepy, scary or how they exude 'badness'!"



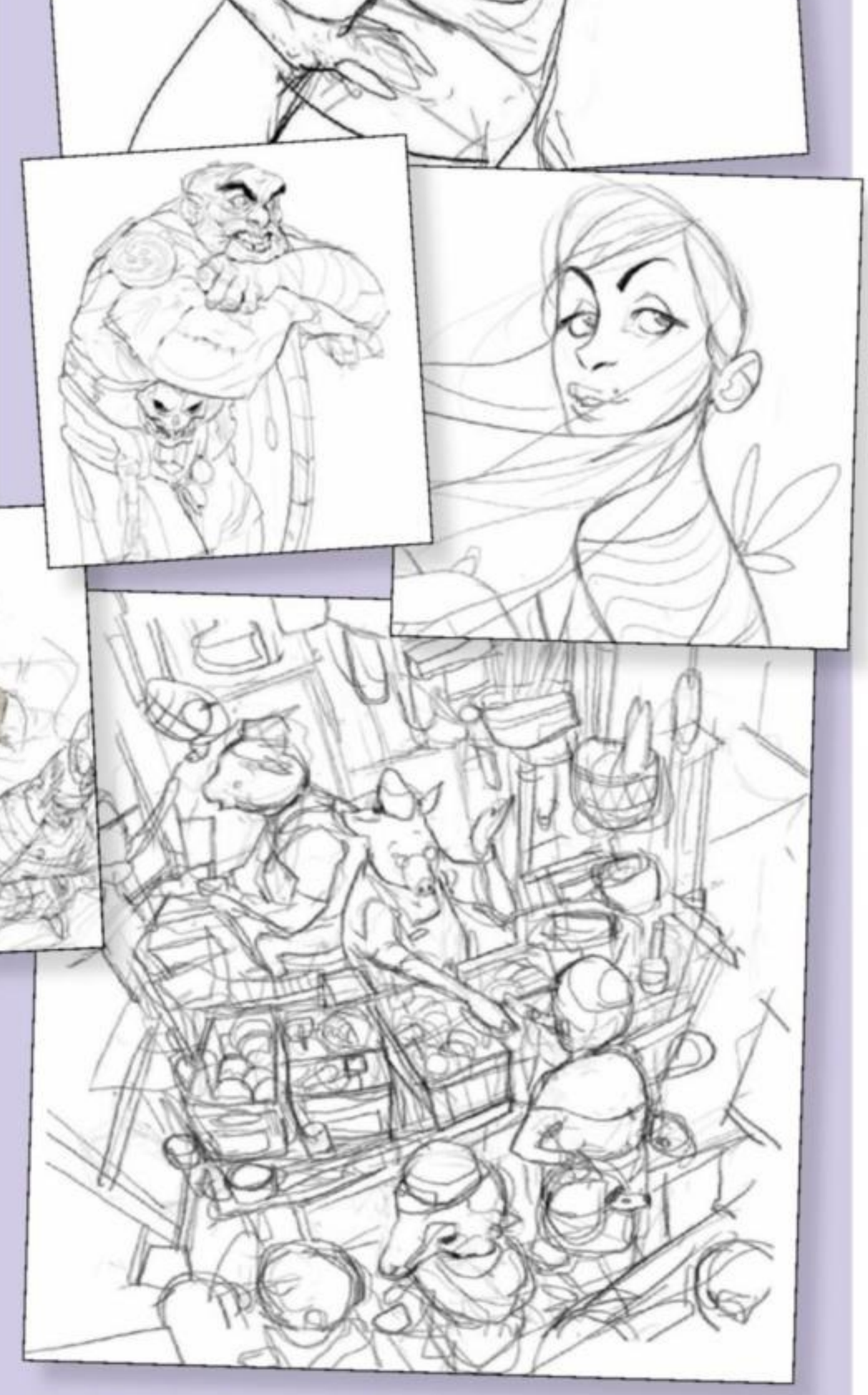
3 BUILD YOUR OWN VISUAL LIBRARY

While it's useful to study characters from pop culture, spend time creating your own file of visual references. I usually use Pinterest to save my images of real-life photos, screenshots from video games, actors in costume, game production art, and even examples of imagery from artists that I follow online. I'm always adding to my Pinterest pages so that they don't become stale. Being organised is an important part of your reference routine.

4 CHOOSE YOUR TOOLS

Don't let your tools define you. Yes, it helps to have a fast computer, but beginners should stick to the basics. As your skills improve and you start making money, gradually invest in newer, better kit. When I started I had a normal PC and a small Genius tablet. A sketchbook enabled me to practise anywhere.

My other key tool is Photoshop, but the only aspect that I've personalised are the brushes and some shortcuts. Digital tools won't help you improve on their own, but can be a benefit if you feel comfortable using them. From experience, I've noticed that a more relaxed artist will be more productive.



5 CURVES AND BIG SHAPES

Once you have an idea of how your character should look, it's doodle time! Begin by producing some thumbnails. Ignore details for now and instead put down the larger shapes. I always start with curves rather than straight lines so that I can warm up my hand and keep things loose and organic, which is a key factor in my art. If you're painting female anatomy then curves are a priority. In contrast, a figure made up of mostly straight lines means that they're a strong, stable character.

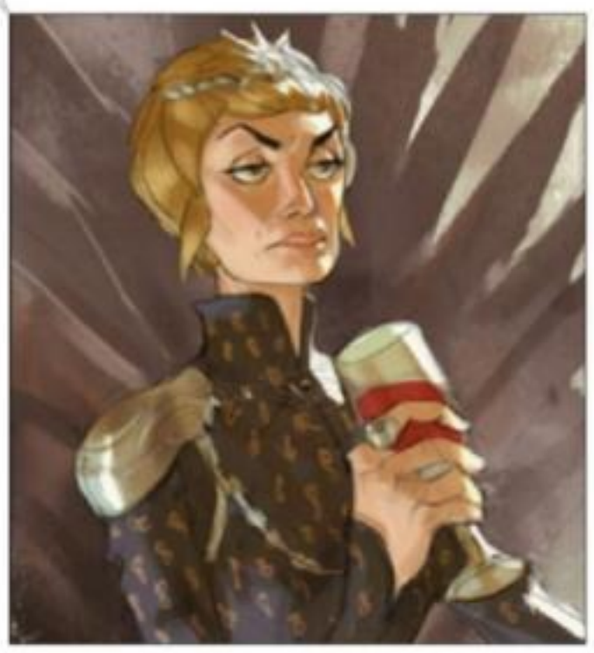
To be honest, I don't feel comfortable starting with a rough concept, but this stage is crucial. You need to be happy with your idea, because you're be working within this space and inside these lines as the concept develops.

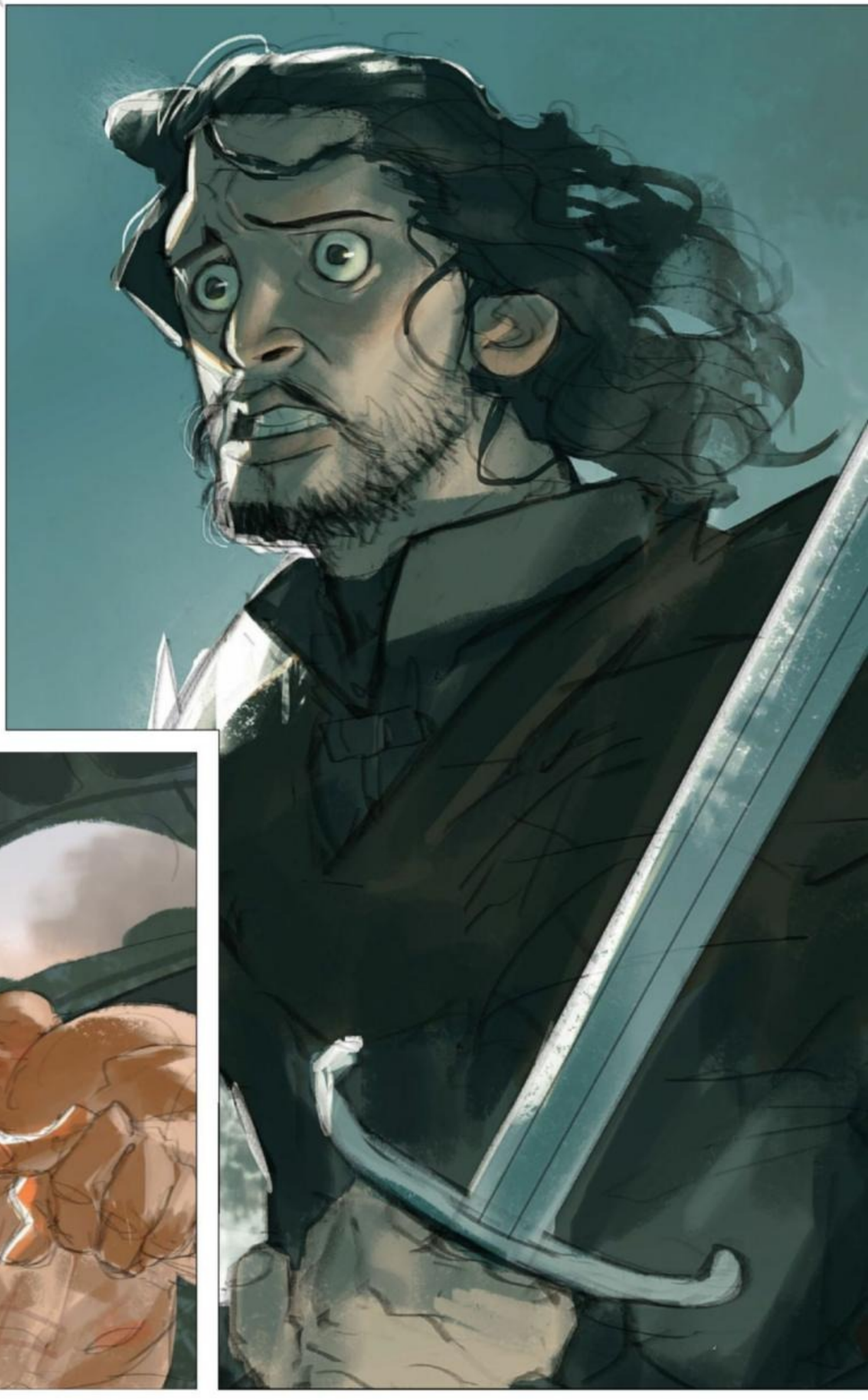
"Begin by producing some thumbnails. Ignore details for now and put down the larger shapes"

6 FACE AND EYES

A key aspect of my characters is their facial expression, and the most important feature is the eyes. They're the first thing that your viewer will notice, so you want them to make the correct impact.

Small pupils will indicate feelings such as anger, surprise, fear and excitement, while large pupils will help you to convey emotions of sadness or happiness. Downcast eyelids can mean they're trusting, arrogant or tired, depending on how you paint the eyebrows. A good expression will always start with the eyes. I tend to draw the face before defining the shape of the head.





7 SHAPE POSES AND BODY LANGUAGE

It's important that a character's body pose complements their facial expression. For example, you can achieve so much with interesting hands. I realise it's tricky to draw hands, but they're a great way to convey emotion, and will always catch the viewer's eye. Hands can help exaggerate an arm gesture, interact with the character's body or even relay a stronger emotion than a facial expression. Then I think about the shape of the body. I always try to create a tangible feeling of weight. All aspects of a character's body – the nose, hair, hands, shoulders, costume, arms, legs and so on – must be affected by gravity. This helps to enhance the realism of the design.

8 RETAIN THE BEST ASPECTS OF A SKETCH

Ramón takes an old sketch and enhances its core ideas for this month's cover

A Practice sketch

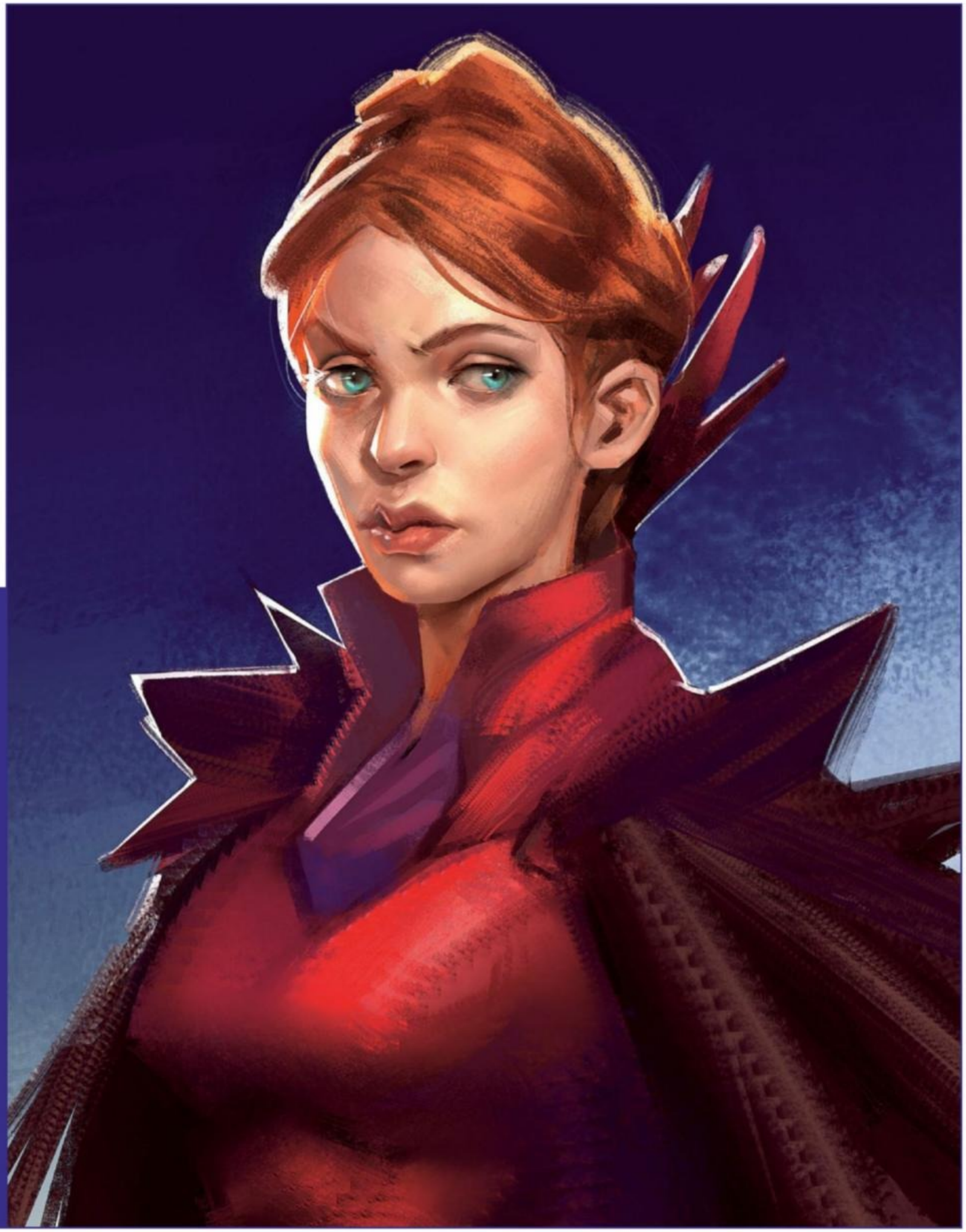
I sketched this character some time ago. My aim was to improve my knowledge of the female anatomy while maintaining a loose sketchbook look. I kept it simple, and concentrated on the values and depicting key anatomy landmarks. Her face was my main focus, with the looser lines suggesting a dress from the Renaissance period.

B Applying values and colour

The ImagineFX team ask me to work up the sketch for the cover. Before painting, I redo the line work to remove the distraction of the existing values. I try to recreate the volumes and the mood with simple brush strokes, paying more attention to the eyes and face, and play around with textures. I want my character to have a stern outlook.

C Refining the character

I smooth down the shapes within the silhouette, such as the face, hair and dress, which helps to create volume. Adding textures accentuates the forms in selective areas of the face and body. Once I'm comfortable with the bigger shapes, I move on to detailing. I fix the values, increase the saturation and then call it finished!



9 COSTUME DESIGN AS A COMPLEMENTARY DEVICE

Think of a character's body as a book. The viewer will start to read from the face and then move on to the body. Take care to be accurate with the visual information that you're supplying about their outfit. It must add to your character, not detract from it. A costume must complement a character.

Once I've roughly illustrated my figure in full I start to add large and small geometric forms, but avoid detailing for now. I'll often dip into my visual library and look for interesting shapes and references that match the subject matter.

“Be accurate with the visual information that you're supplying about an outfit”

10 PERSONALITY AND COLOUR CHOICES

My approach to colours is simple. I start with grey tones because I don't want to be distracted by the effects of saturation. Then I try to maintain the character's "message" by choosing colours that help to convey their nature. A darker personality would feature cold, destaturated colours such as blue, green and violet. I'd use warm, saturated tones like red, orange and yellow for more lively characters.

Sometimes I create a little contrast by mixing cold and warm tones, although not in the same amounts: perhaps 80 per cent of desaturated blue and 20 per cent of its complement, such as a saturated orange. These proportions will be dictated by your character's design.

11 MOOD AND STEREOTYPES

Not every evil character needs to feature dark, cold and desaturated colours. Yet it's common to associate this palette with feelings of sadness, fear and loneliness, much like red is linked with danger and yellow with a warning. There are similar colour associations in the animal kingdom.

Many of the decisions made by a character designer will be based on making the viewer react in a certain way. If you're are going to do something different, like apply bright colours to an evil character, there must be elements that reinforce their dark nature, such as outlandish anatomy or a torn costume. This will ensure that the warmer colours won't act as a distraction.

12 SIMPLIFICATION THROUGH LIGHT

Adding value by painting light generates volume. Here's how...

A Establish the base and shapes

After I've finished my drawing I paint the local colour, or in this case the halftone. This will act as my base. I define shapes with this halftone as well as the silhouette of my shape (the character's head and body).

B Shadows and volumes

I decide on the direction of my primary light source by adding a darker tone to my base, which helps me bring in the shadows. How I paint the shape of my shadow will help me to generate the volumes in the face.

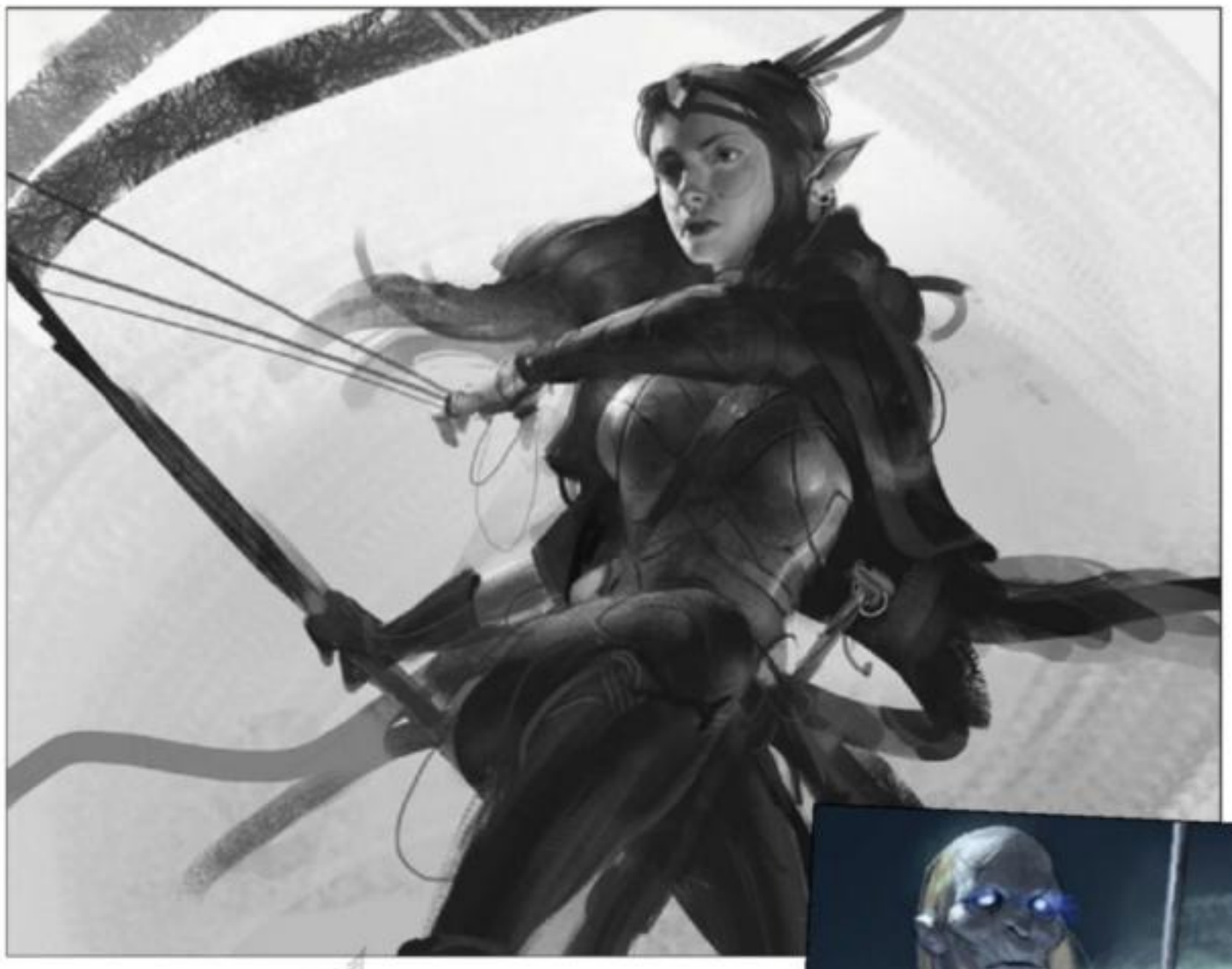
C Highlights and rim light

Finally, I bring in white tones in the darkest areas of my character's face, which helps me create contrast and make it looks more interesting. I limit the use of white tones, because too much can be a distraction.

13 FEWER VALUES, MORE CONTROL

Early on in my learning process I produced lots of painting studies. Each day I'd find an interesting reference image that was full of shapes and contrast, and then try to reproduce it using my art tools. I learned how to create volume with values, but also how easy it is to drift away from the original sketch. If you don't control your values then you can distort your character's anatomy.

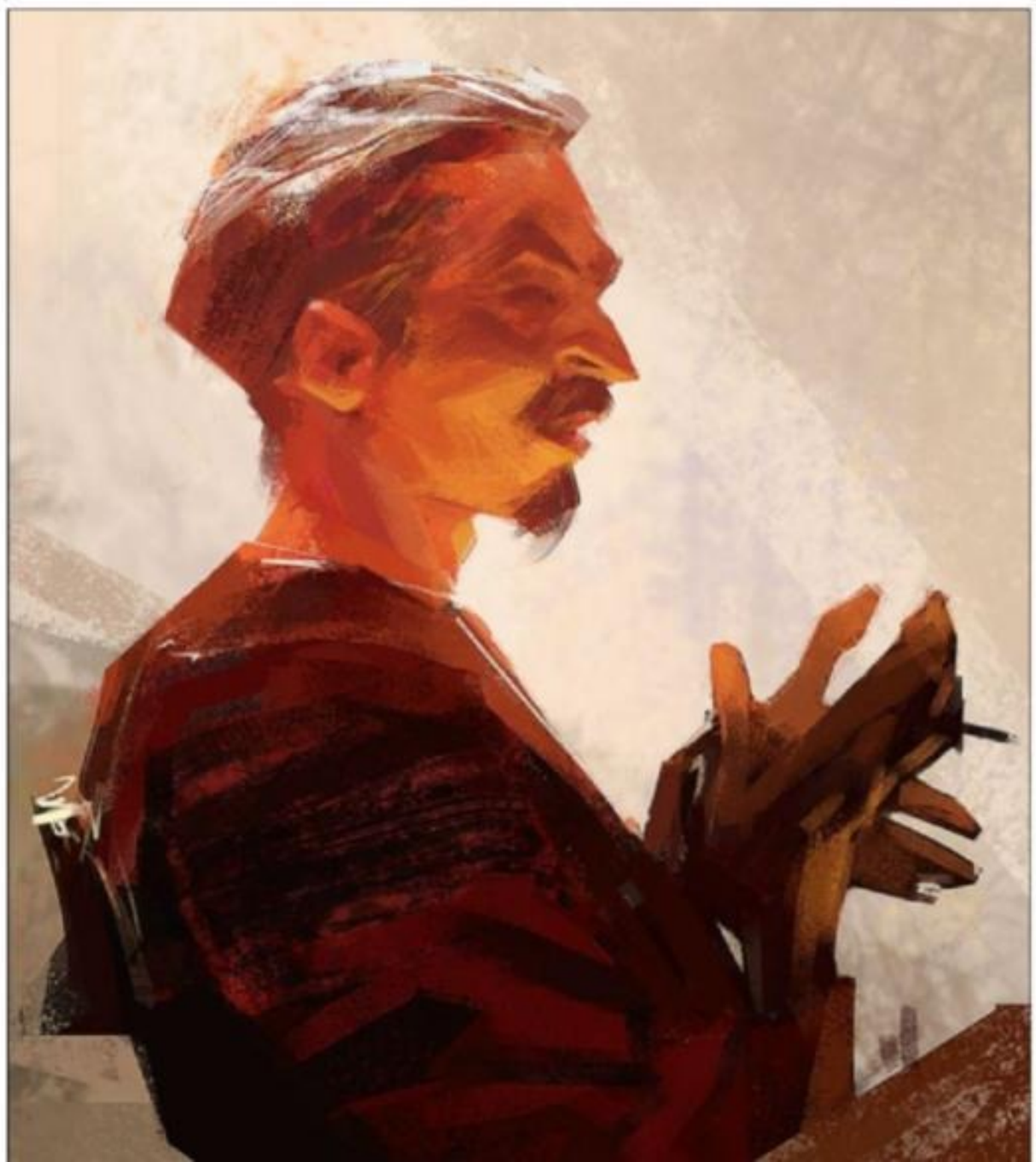
The face in particular is very delicate. One simple line can change the expression completely, let alone several brushstrokes. So keep it simple and work with just three values. If you feel comfortable you can always add more.



14 PLAY WITH TEXTURES

I can use soft brushes and make a clean render on my characters, but I like to play with brush strokes and add a little more interesting information to the render. I study the work of artists who produce amazing digital paintings: they emulate the traditional look of the Old Masters but with digital brushes. To me that's an incredible skill. I'm still a fan of oil on rough canvas, so that's why I try to capture that look using just a handful of brushes. I only use them for the detailing stage, because my main goal is always to produce a decent drawing.

"I'm a fan of oil on rough canvas, so that's why I try to capture that look using just a handful of brushes"



15 DISCIPLINE GOES A LONG WAY

There's only one way to grow better as an artist and it's with discipline. If you set yourself goals, organise your tools, produce clean studies and practise regularly, then you're sure to improve. And finally, enjoy painting! You'll run into difficulties from time to time, but if you like what you do then you'll always find a reason to continue.

Pascal Campion
Workshop and interview with the DreamWorks and Disney artist!

Next month in...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

Animation art advice

We delve into the artists, studios and digital techniques that create this dynamic art form!

All this… and more!

Craig Elliott workshop
Create an epic vis dev animation location with this much-loved artist.

Are you in an art bubble?
How to broaden your artistic horizons on social media & beyond.

Aardman Animations
We take a peek behind the scenes at the legendary UK studio.

Cinematic sci-fi painting
Bryan Mark Taylor paints a stunning atmospheric scene using oils.

ISSUE 154 ON SALE IN THE UK *Friday 6 October*

Core Skills: Part 2

USING ZSPHERES IN ZBRUSHCORE

Pablo Muñoz Gómez continues the ZBrushCore series with an introduction to ZSpheres, another great tool to create meshes

Artist **PROFILE**

Pablo Muñoz Gómez

LOCATION: Australia

Pablo works as a concept artist and animator in Melbourne. He's also a 3D tutor and enjoys passing on his knowledge to students.

www.zbrushguides.com

In this article we're going to take a look at the ZSpheres in ZBrushCore. This feature is unique to ZBrush and ZBrushCore and it enables you to create complex armatures, very quickly, that can be converted into sculptable meshes with the click of a button. You can think about ZSpheres as a tool to create the skeleton of your mesh before sculpting.

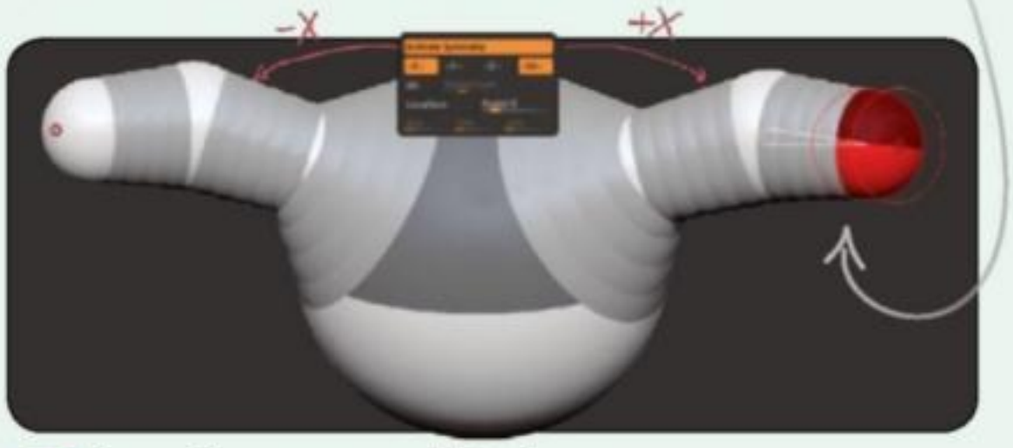
Because this is a unique tool, it has a series of unique attributes that won't be available unless you have a ZSphere selected. For instance, the brush thumbnail will say Sketch 1 and an additional sub-palette called Adaptive Skin will be visible under the Tool palette. For easy access you can operate the Move, Scale and Rotate manipulator with the hotkeys W, E and R.

There are a few ZSpheres projects that come with ZBrushCore and they can be found under the Projects tab in a folder conveniently called ZSpheres. Feel free to load them up and explore this feature, but you won't need them in this workshop because I'll show you how to create your own base mesh.

Load any project or tool from the lightbox with a double-click.

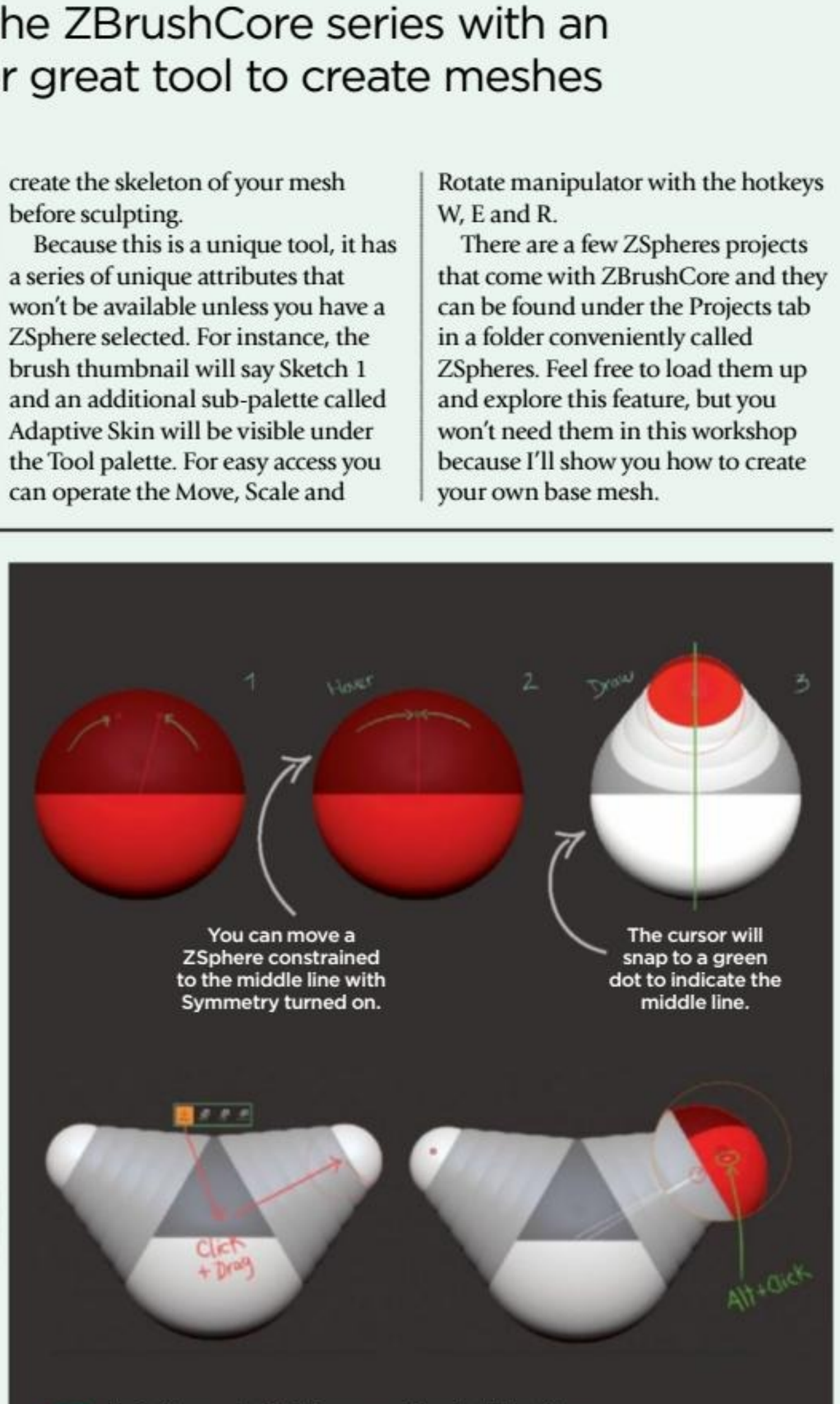
You can also choose the ZSphere from the Tool palette.

With symmetry turned on you'll see a small dot that mirrors the placement of your active (red) ZSphere.



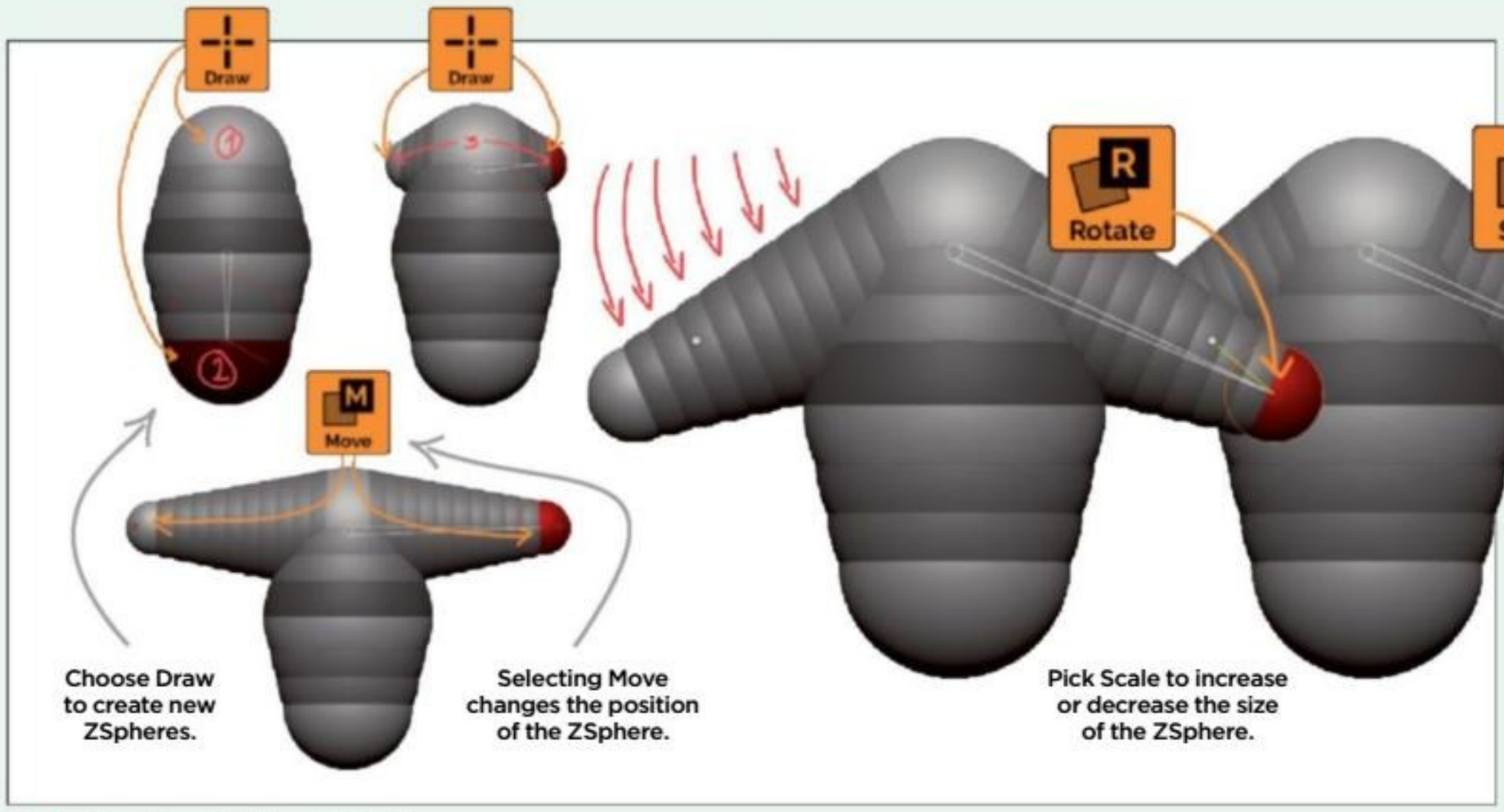
1 Loading a new ZSphere

Let's load a brand new ZSphere from the lightbox by double-clicking the ZSphere.ZPR file. Alternatively, you can select the Tool thumbnail and select the ZSphere from the pop-up. Press X to enable symmetry, so you can build both sides at the same time. You can also access symmetry by going to Transform palette>Activate Symmetry.


1
Hover
2
Draw
3
You can move a ZSphere constrained to the middle line with Symmetry turned on.
The cursor will snap to a green dot to indicate the middle line.
Click + Drag
Alt+Click

2 Adding, deleting and middle line

With the ZSphere loaded, Draw (Q) will be enabled and you can simply click the ZSphere and drag to create another ZSphere. To delete a ZSphere, hold Alt and click it. With Symmetry turned On, hover over the centre of the ZSphere and you'll see that the two red dots snap into a single green one. This will create a new ZSphere in the middle.



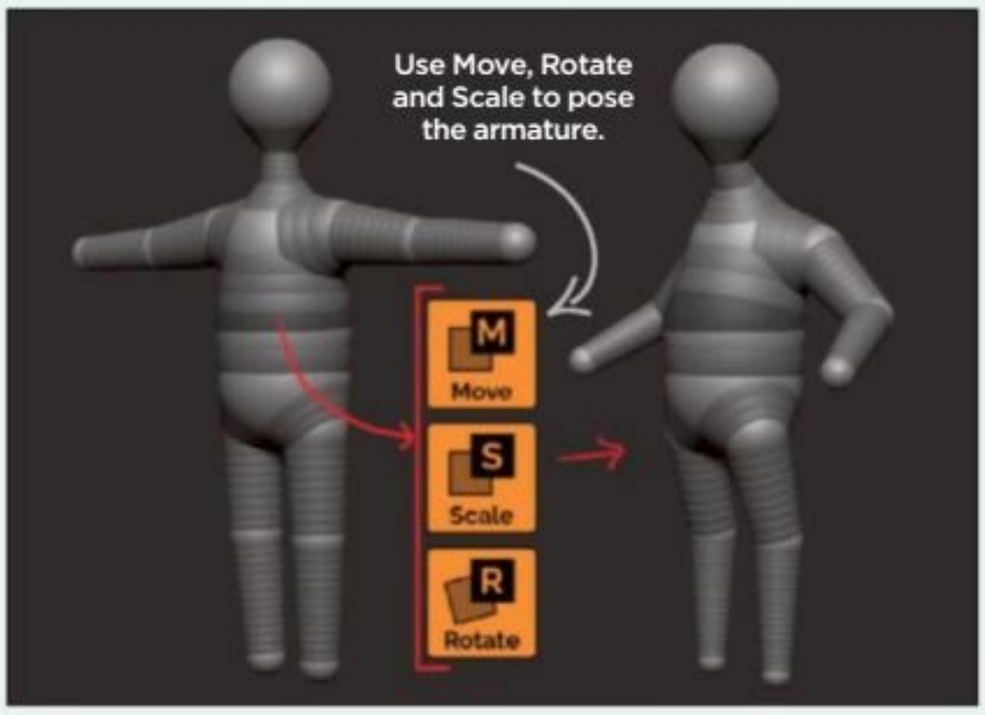
PRO SECRETS

Project details

The DynaMesh Resolution slider determines the amount of geometry that mesh will have when the adaptive skin is created. You can click Preview (A) to see it before you create the mesh.

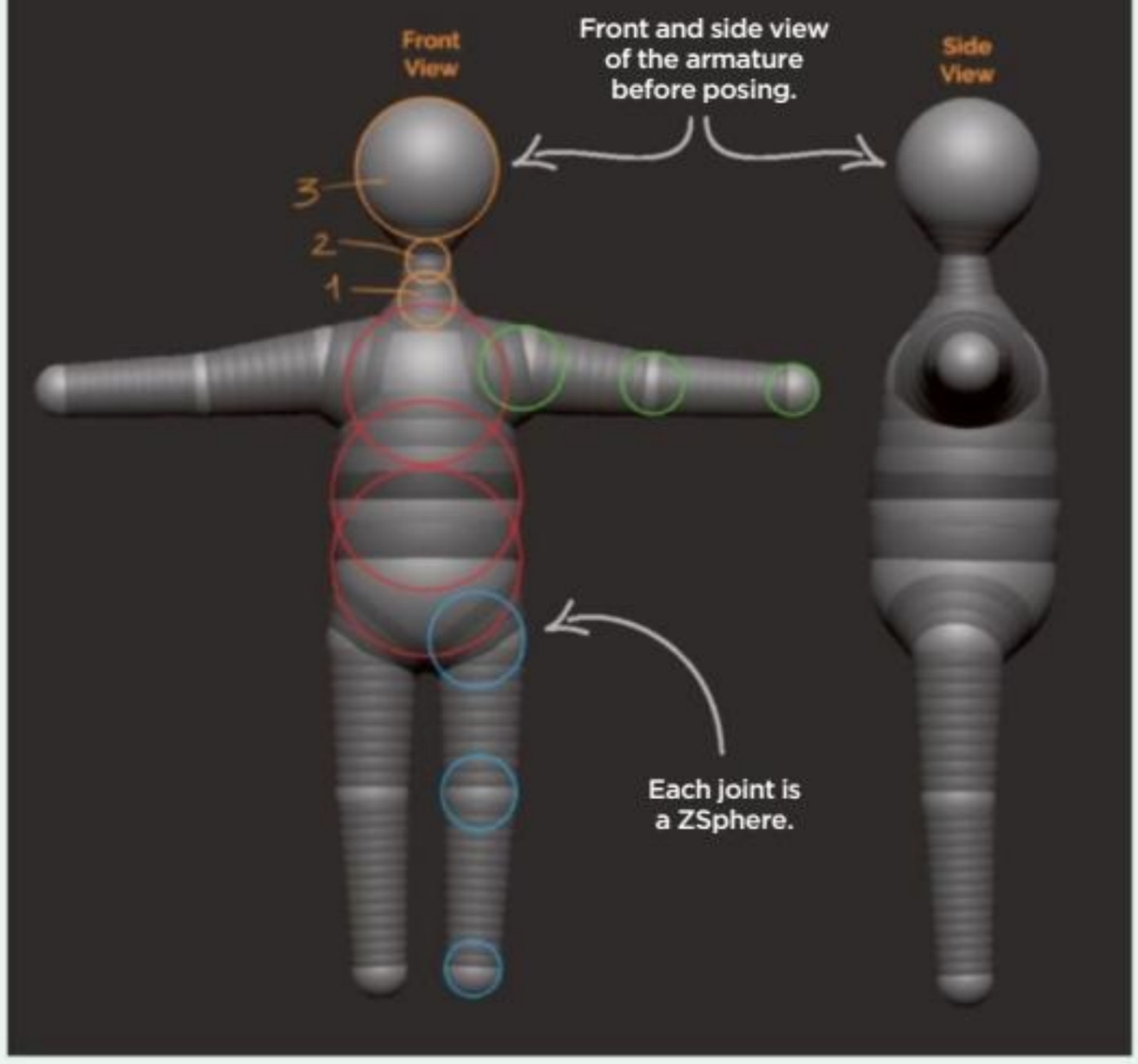
3 Manipulating ZSpheres

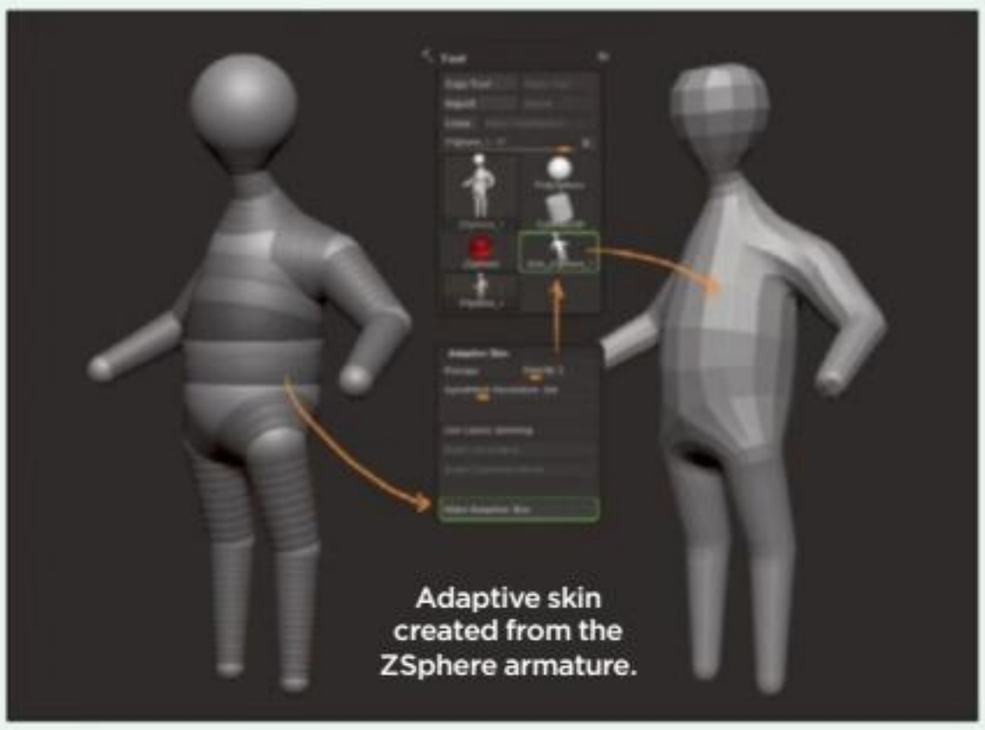
Click in the middle of the top of the sphere (dark red) and drag to create a new one. Do the same thing at the bottom (light red). There'll now be a torso. Go ahead and add one to each side of the top ZSphere, then use move (W) to pull a couple of arms. You can scale (E) or rotate (R) the new ZSphere by clicking the sphere or on the link between the spheres.



4 Completing the armature

Now we'll add two more ZSpheres at the bottom for the legs and three more at the top to create the neck and the head for the base of our character. After establishing the length of the legs, arms and torso we can select Draw (Q) again and add new ZSpheres in between the arms and legs to create knees, elbows and shoulders.





5 Strike a pose

Use the Move, Scale and rotate tools to make the armature look less rigid. In this case we're creating a T-Pose, so it's easier to sculpt it later, but you can create any pose you want. Now let's turn this armature into a sculptable mesh. Expand the Adaptive Skin sub-palette and click the Make Adaptive Skin button. You should see that a new tool has been created, which you can use to start sculpting with any brush.

Photoshop & Carapace

STORY-DRIVEN DAILY SKETCHING

Join illustrator **Atey Ghailan** as he takes you through his workflow for envisioning and creating a sketch that's inspired by his surroundings

Artist **PROFILE**

Atey Ghailan
LOCATION: US

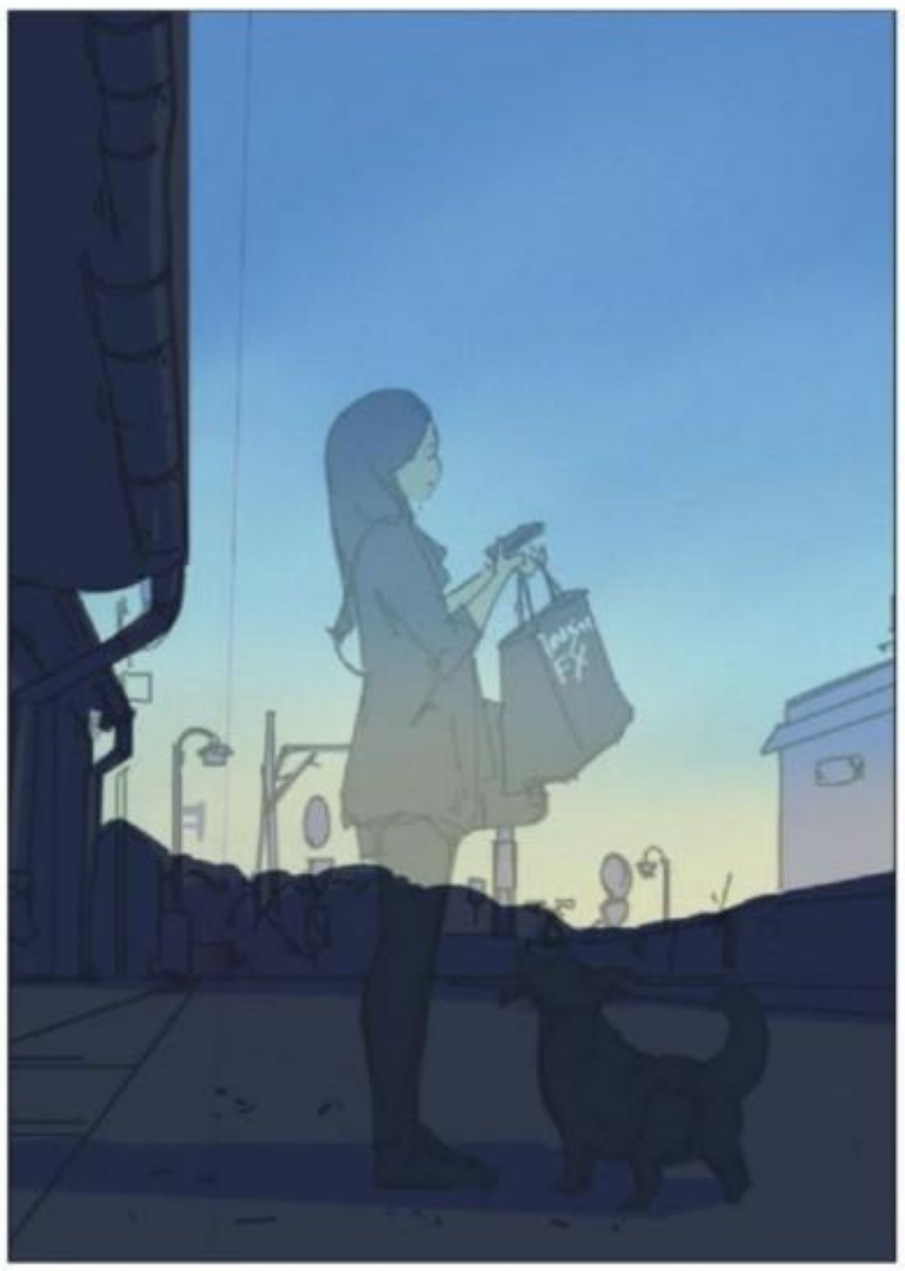
Atey is an illustrator and concept artist who's working at Riot Games. Previously he's produced art for Star Citizen, Galaxy Saga, Legends of the Cryptids and Assassins Creed Unity.
http://ifxm.ag/atey-g

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

In this workshop I'll be sharing my thought process and approach to creating a story-driven sketch, inspired by events I encounter in my daily life. Last year I challenged myself to do one of these every day for a year. It was a rewarding experience and it's an exercise I still try to do regularly because I believe that it helps me develop as an artist.

Because this sketch is set in an urban area, it's important to get the perspective as accurate as possible, which is why, alongside Photoshop, I also use Carapace (a free program that's no longer officially available) that helps me set up a perspective grid in a timely manner. Keep in mind, Carapace is just a tool to support you – actually learning and understanding perspective is going to make your life much easier.

The goal here is not only to show you how I work, but also to encourage you to take inspiration from your surroundings. Even if you only have time for a quick sketch, it's important to get your ideas down on paper.



PRO SECRETS

Sketching from life

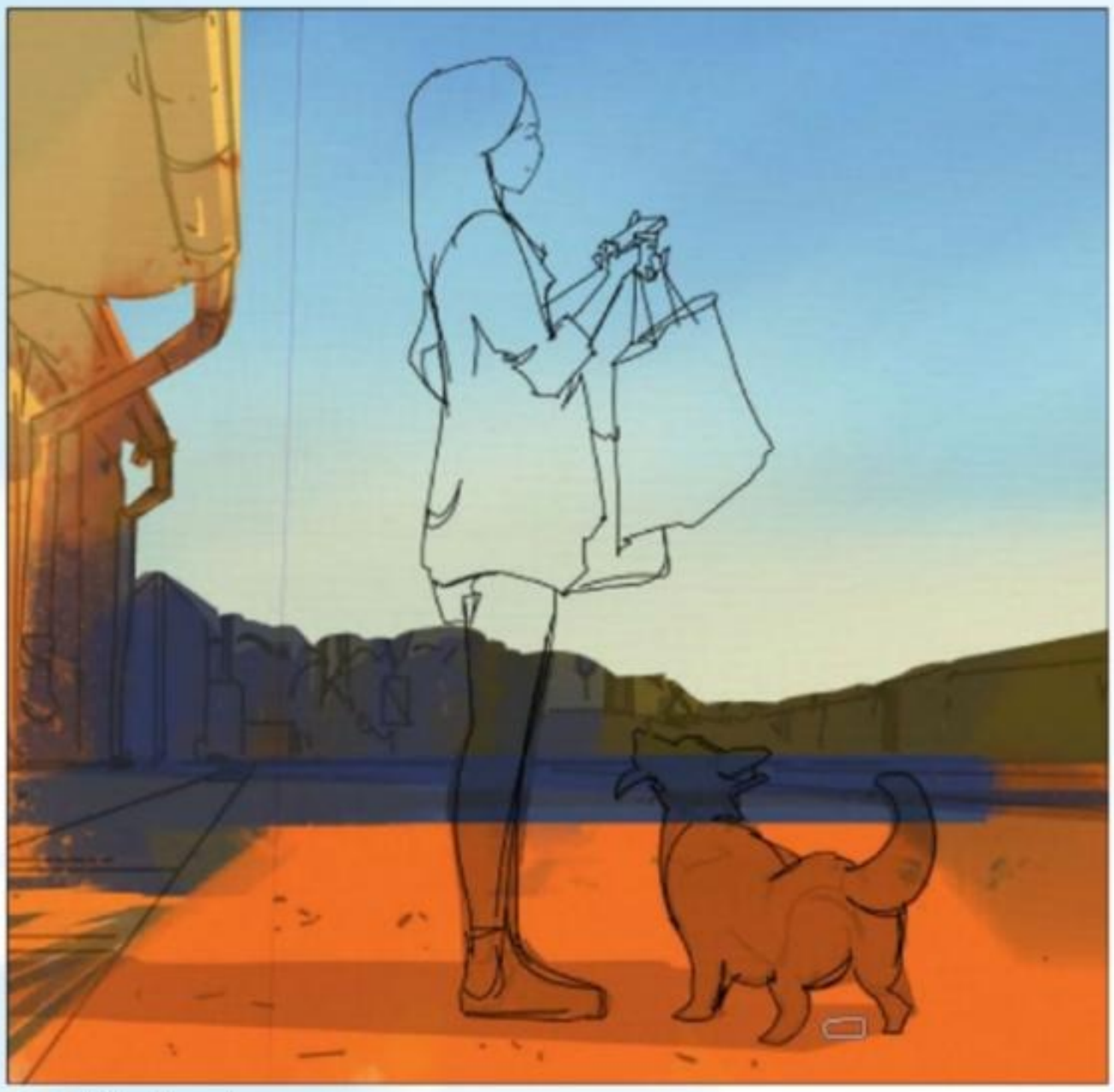
Keep a sketchbook with you at all times, and sketch whenever you can. Even 10 minutes while waiting for your coffee adds up over time. I prefer to use an ink pen to draw because when you can't erase, it teaches you to become more careful with your mark-making.

1 Thumbnail stage

The first thing I try to do with any image is to capture the feeling of the story that I want to convey. Sometimes I use line work, like above, and sometimes I go straight into the painting stage. This is the right time to solve any concerns you might have, because mistakes become harder to fix further down the creative process.

2 Separating sky and ground

At this stage, my main goal is to simply separate the sky from the ground in two layers. This makes it easier to paint and do adjustments, since I already know that I don't want these two parts of the image merging together. I'm filling in the ground with a darker colour so I can see it more clearly – this isn't the colour I'll be using later on.



3 First colour pass

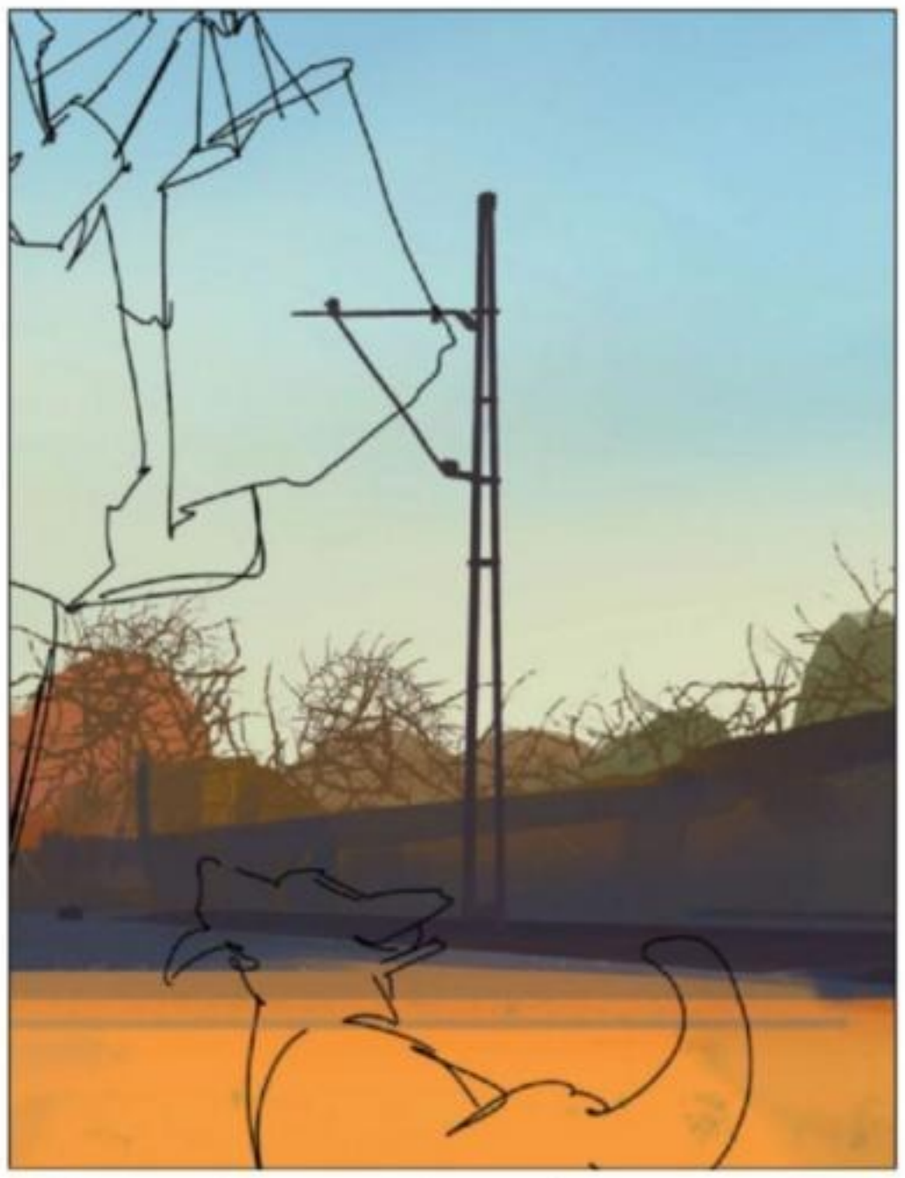
I decided in advance that I wanted this scene to take place while the sun is setting, so here I'm blocking in some very vibrant colours to get rid of the dark colour that I added at the start. I also think that it's much easier to start with very saturated colours and tone it down later on, than to do the opposite.

4 Balancing colours and values

Here I'm trying to get an overall read for the image. I decide how saturated I want the colours to be: you can see that I've already toned the orange down from the previous step. I'm trying to paint with a lot of broad strokes and avoid tiny brush strokes and detail.

5 Adding details and introducing depth

Being happy with the overall look of the image, I feel like it's time to do the details. I start with what's furthest away in the image and slowly work my way forward. I do this because it's easier to plan which shapes are going to overlap, and overlapping sells the sense of depth in the image.

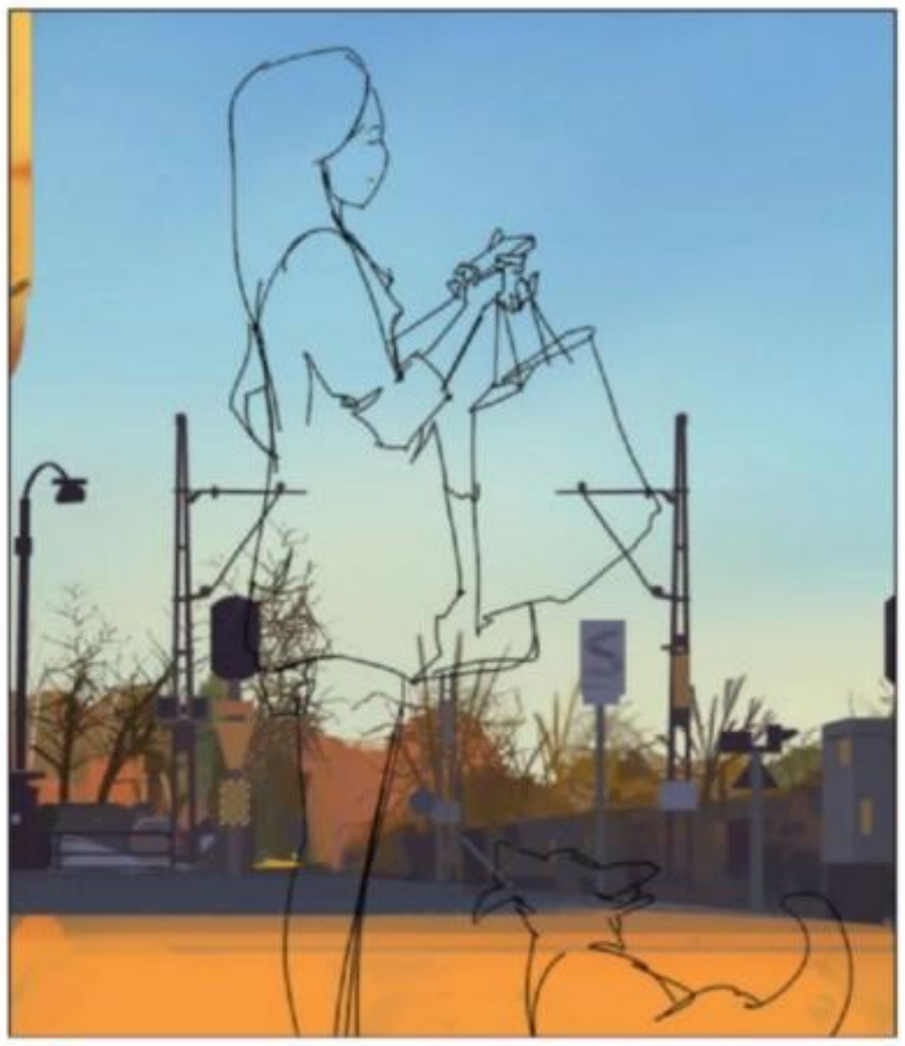


6 Drawing more branches

When drawing something that's far away, such as trees and branches in this case, it's important to suggest them, rather than draw every tree and every branch individually, because they're not the focus in this image. However, if these trees were closer to the viewer then I'd have to draw them more clearly.

7 Getting there now...

Right now, the overall read of the background is almost done and I'm slowly moving closer to my character. Since I've been working as an environment concept artist for a long time, I prefer to do the environment before I tackle the character.



8 Lasso and Selection tools

Here I add some more details to the background by using the Lasso (hit L for a shortcut) and the Selection tools (press M). They're very easy to manage and add a lot of sharp and crisp edges to your details.

9 Selecting my character

Just as with the first step for the environment, where I separated the sky from the ground, here I separate the characters from everything else. I use a brush with no Pen Pressure to avoid transparent pixels and obtain crisp edges. I also change the dog's breed and pose.

PRO SECRETS

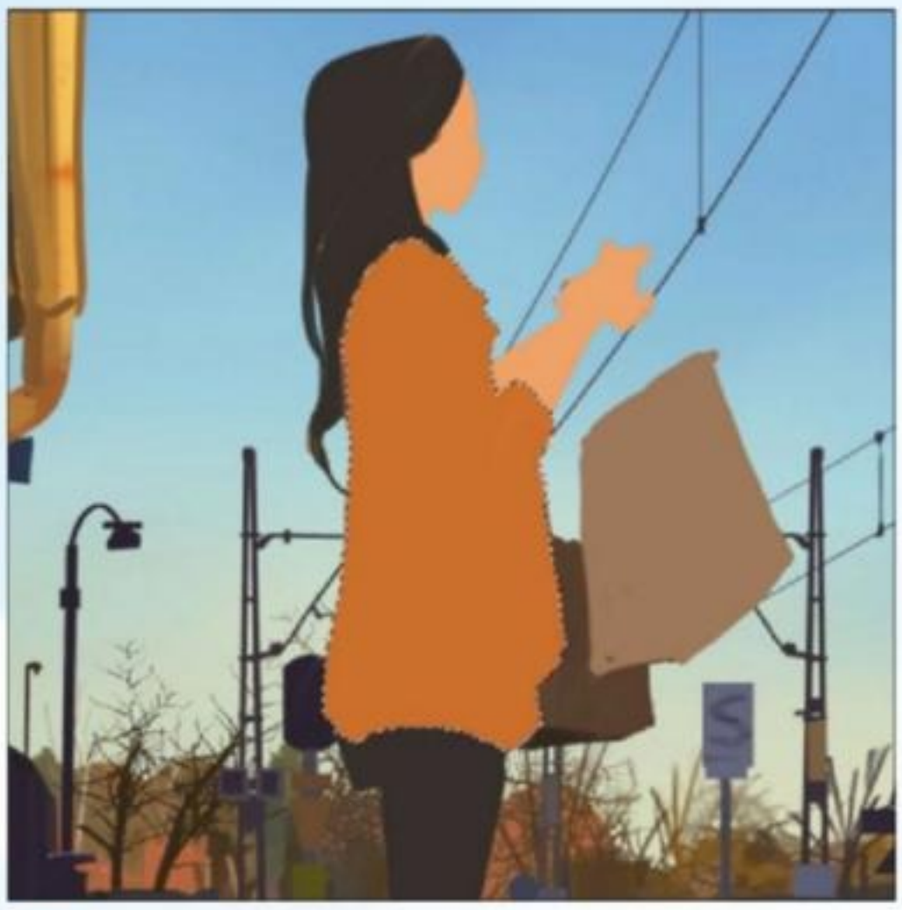
Avoid creating tangents

Tangents appear when your objects touch in a very precise way. This can cause confusion with depth in the image, because it's hard to see what's in front and what's in the back, or what's above and what's below. Always try to create clear overlaps.

PRO SECRETS

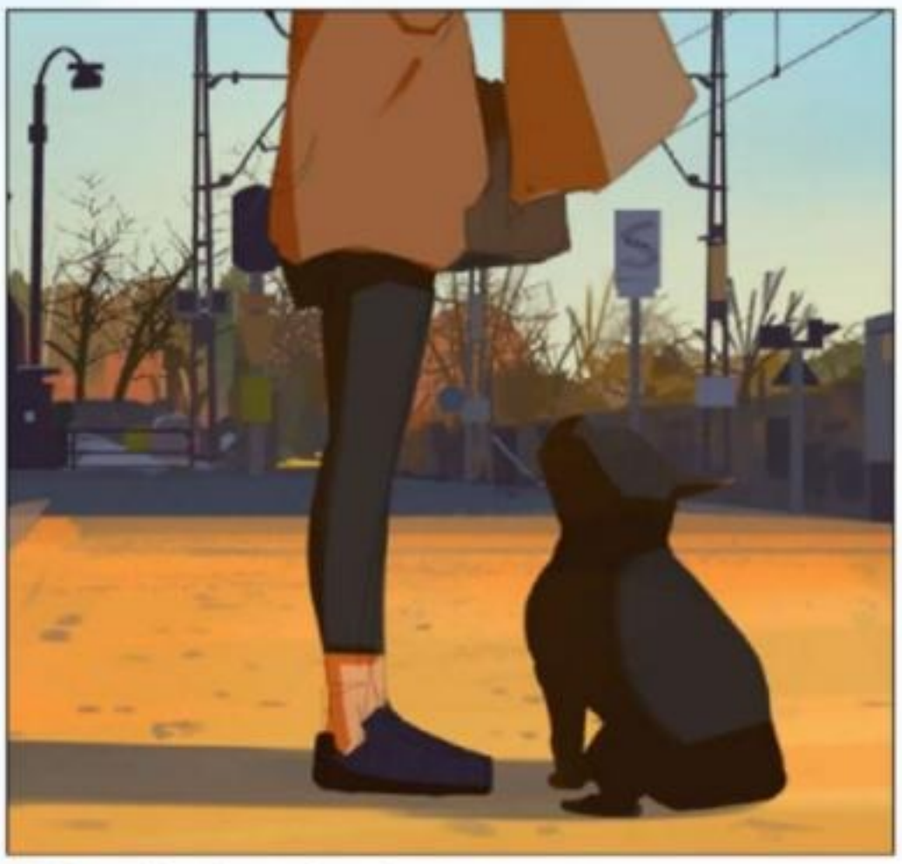
Plan ahead of time

By thinking about your image ahead of time, you can solve a lot of problems before you even start painting. Think about the story you want to tell and about how you want the viewer to feel. For example, if you want a sad reaction, there are specific colours and lighting scenarios that people associate with gloominess.



10 Local colour and value

Because I have the selection for the character, it's very easy to block in the local value and colour of her and the dog. Local colour is the base colour of our subject, without any light or shadow affecting it. By establishing that, we can easily add light later on.



11 Painting shadows

Now that I've established and blocked in local colour and value, I can easily introduce shadows on a new layer with the Multiply setting and change it until I'm happy with how it looks. The shadow layer is linked to the main layer. You link the layers by holding Alt and clicking between them.

12 Merging the layers and adding detail

Once I'm happy with the overall look of the shadow layer, I merge it with the main layer and start painting on top. I do this because it's easier to change proportions, erase and add things if the layers are merged. In this stage I go back and forth between the character and the background and add detail where I think it's needed. Since I decided on the composition, and the colours and light early on, right now all that's left is detail. This stage can go on until you're satisfied.

13 Final touches

In the end I decide to add a train, which was in the sketch early on but I removed. I also make some slight adjustments to the dog, since he was creating a tangent with a shape in the back. Tangents appear when objects overlap too precisely with each other and it looks unnatural. And then I call the sketch finished!

net

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Photoshop

CREATE A STRONG POSE & SILHOUETTE

Tan Zhi Hui demonstrates his creative process for developing a male character with an intriguing concept, and unusual shapes and silhouette

Artist **PROFILE**

Tan Zhi Hui
LOCATION: Malaysia

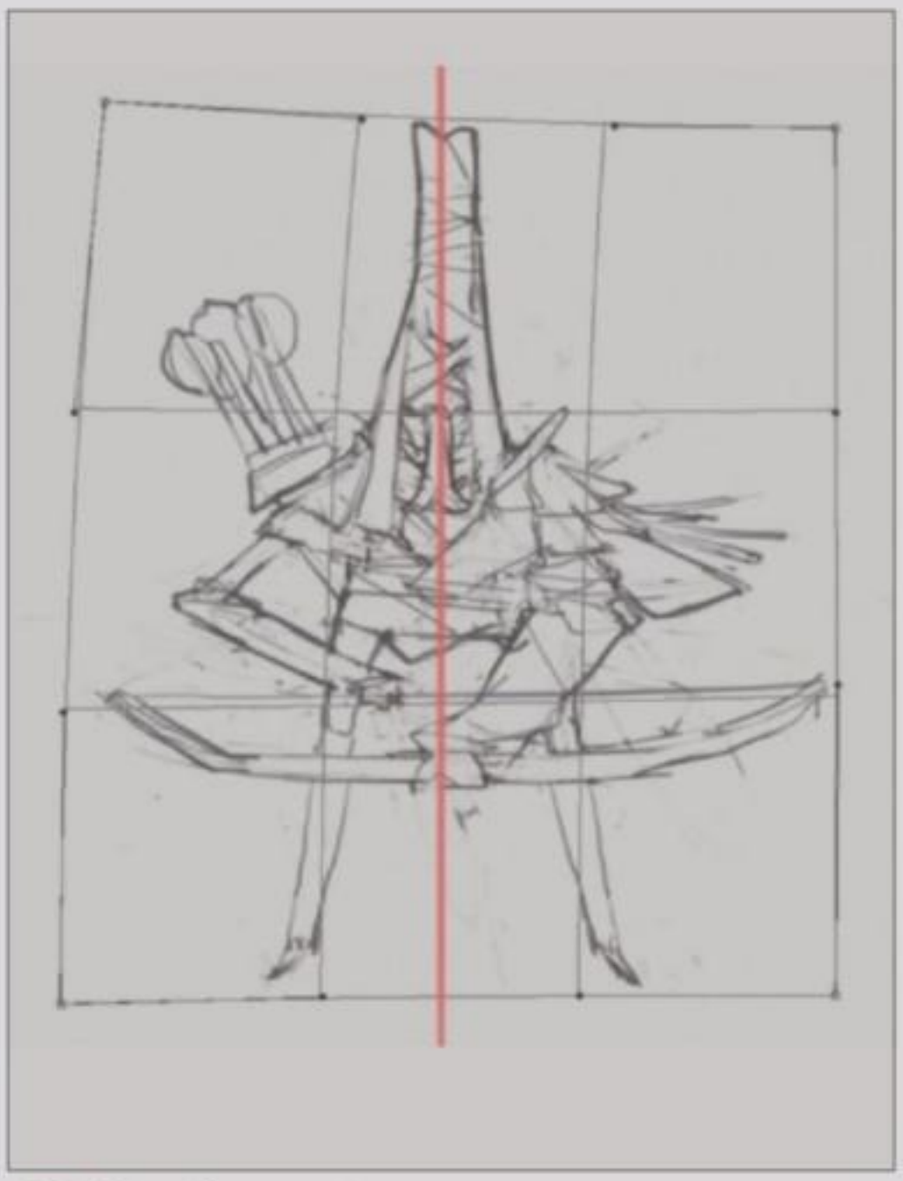
Zhi Hui is a freelance illustrator mostly working in the video games industry. He provides services to well-known clients like Capcom, Blizzard Entertainment and Microsoft Studios.
www.kudaman-art.com

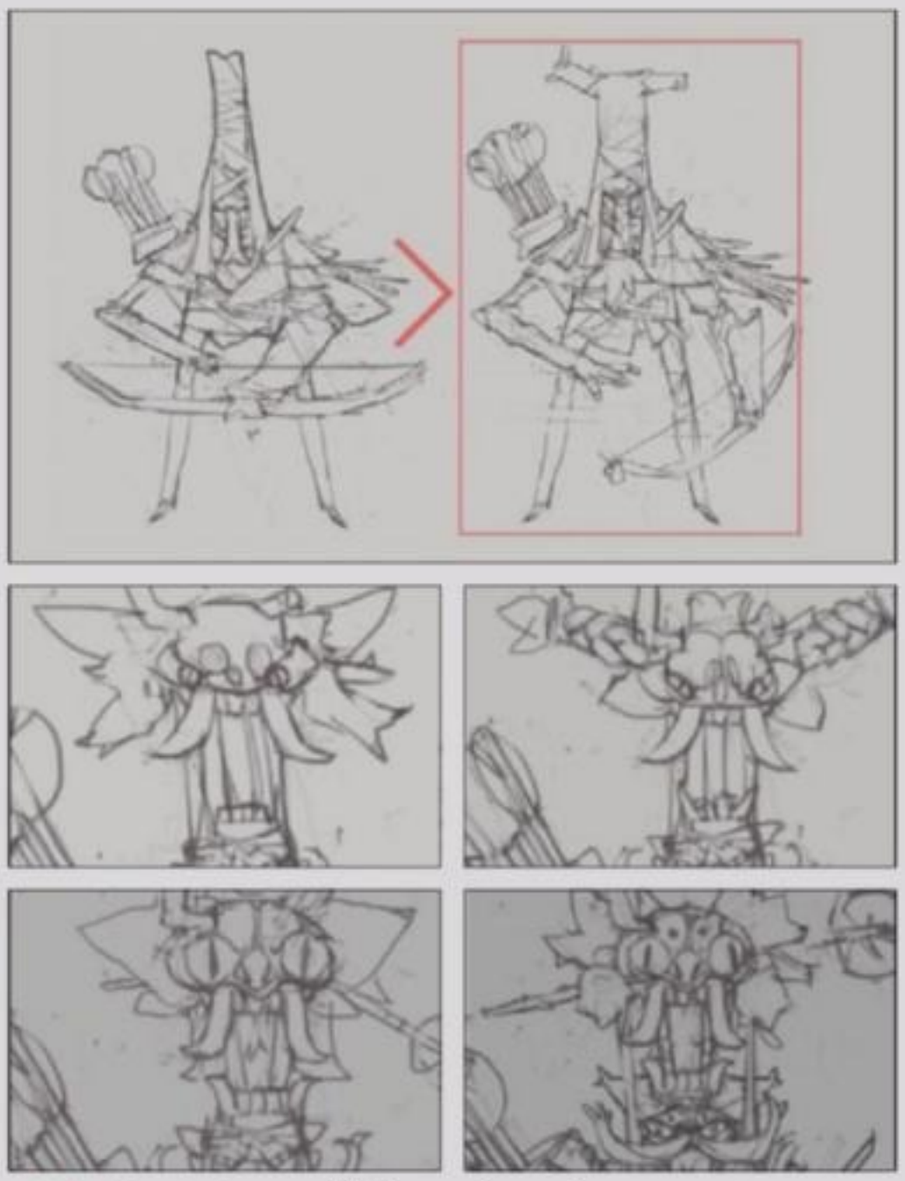
GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

When ImagineFX asked me to create an exaggerated male character, I realised that's basically what I've been doing during my free time for the past few years. Other than client work, all my personal work is about exaggeration, pushing the shapes, fun, motion and camera angle to the limit. I think it's hard for me not to do it.

I believe that characters with cool shapes, interesting colour choices and fun silhouettes creates a strong first impression, which is going to make your image stand out from the crowd, drawing the audience in. If you focus too much on the little details, particularly the theme and story of your creation, then there's a chance of neglecting the importance of its overall appearance.

In this workshop I'm going to talk about the methods I frequently use. In addition to the techniques I'm going to discuss, I'll also share my thought process while designing characters. I hope you'll be able to learn something from this!





PRO SECRETS

Custom shortcut keys

Not every tool you use in Photoshop comes with a default shortcut key. In order to enhance your workflow, it's best to make custom shortcut keys to tools you always use. I have my Warp tool set to Ctrl+W, and Flip Canvas to Ctrl+F. Go to Edit>Keyboard Shortcuts... to make your own shortcuts.

1 Starting out

I decide to draw an archer. During sketching, I tend to prioritise the character's silhouette and pose. I prefer exploring it with line art instead of blocking out the shapes with solid colour brushes, so I can explore the details of the character at the same time. Remember to flip your canvas often to make sure the composition isn't off key. I use the Wrap tool (Edit>Transform>Wrap) to make larger-scale shape adjustments.

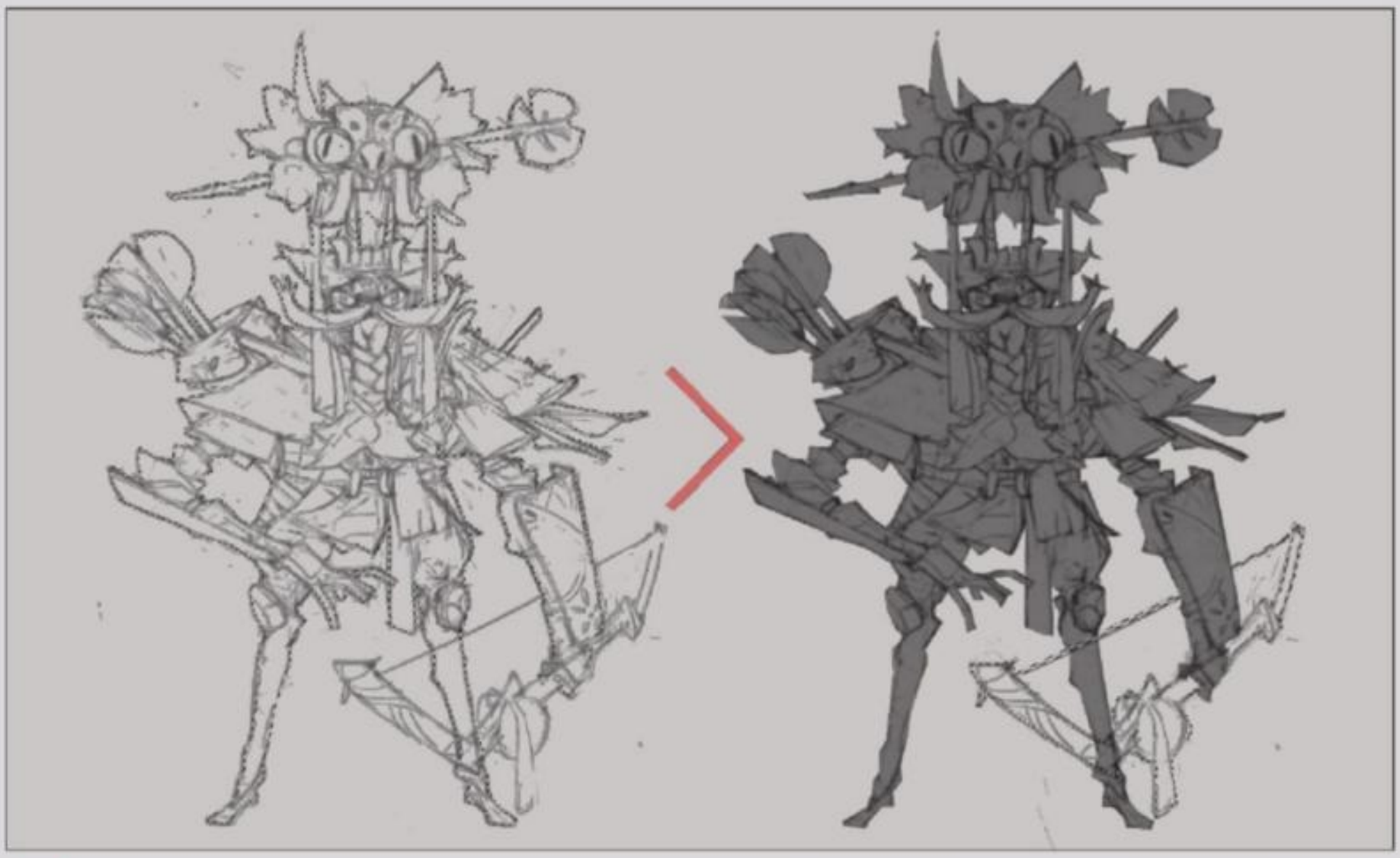
2 Sketch and idea development

I think about how the sketch looks on a plain background, and try to create an interesting composition to sell the character. It often takes me quite a long time to find a pose/composition that I'm completely happy with. After finalising the character pose, it's mostly about applying more details and deciding what element to use in the execution. It's a lot of fun exploring the design of the head piece during this stage.

PRO SECRETS

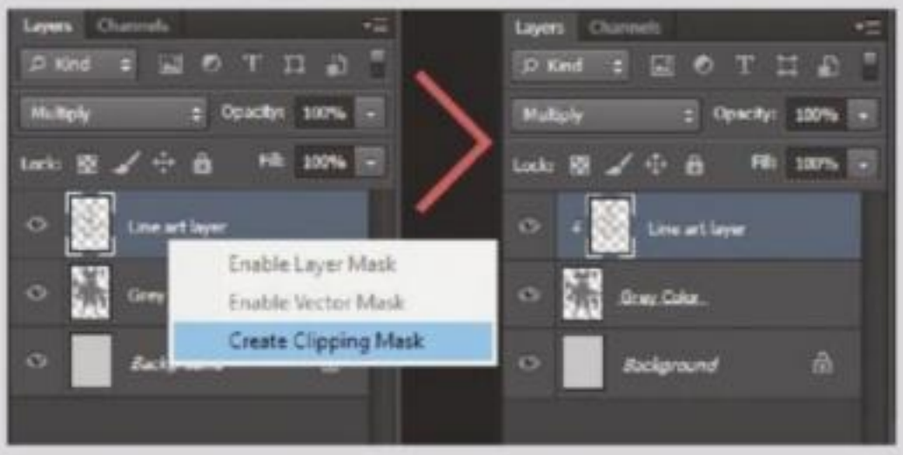
Soft outline

Here's what you need to do to create soft outline on a selected layer: right-click the layer and choose Blending Options. Check Outer Glow, and then under the Structure tab change Blend Mode to Normal. Now select the colour of your outline under the same tab.



3 Making a selection

Feel free to use whichever selection tool you're comfortable with: Lasso, Quick Selection, Magic Wand and so on. In this case, I use the Polygonal Lasso tool because there are a lot of straight lines and hard edges in my character sketch. After the selection, I create another layer under my line art layer and fill the selected area with grey. Then I select Create Clipping Mask from the Layer drop-down menu. This makes the grey colour layer act as a mask. I keep the bow on a separate layer.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

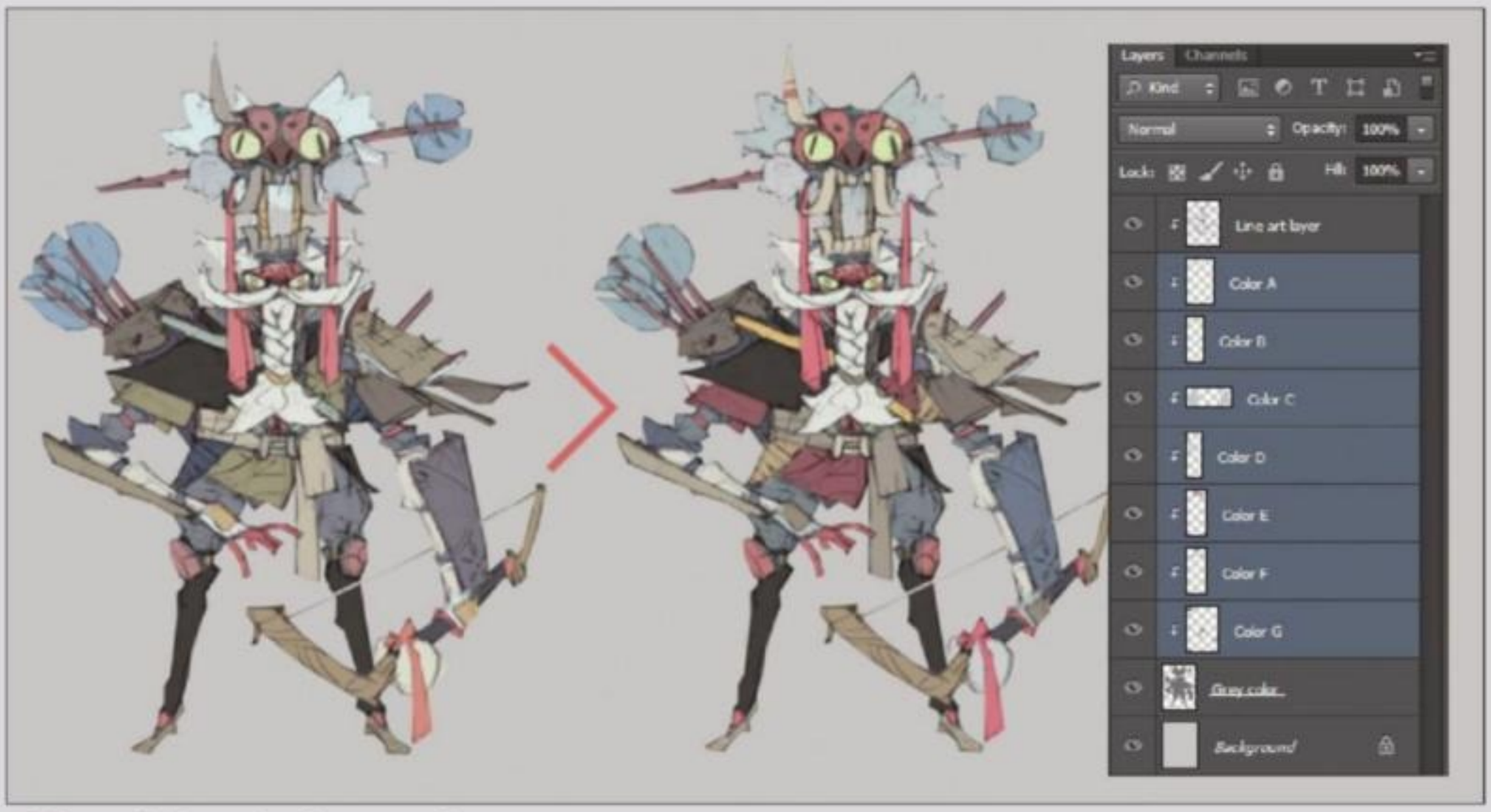
PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: UTILITY ROUND BRUSH

A Round brush with Opacity and Hardness settings. I end up using this brush in 99 per cent of my paintings. It's suitable for every stage of my creative process.

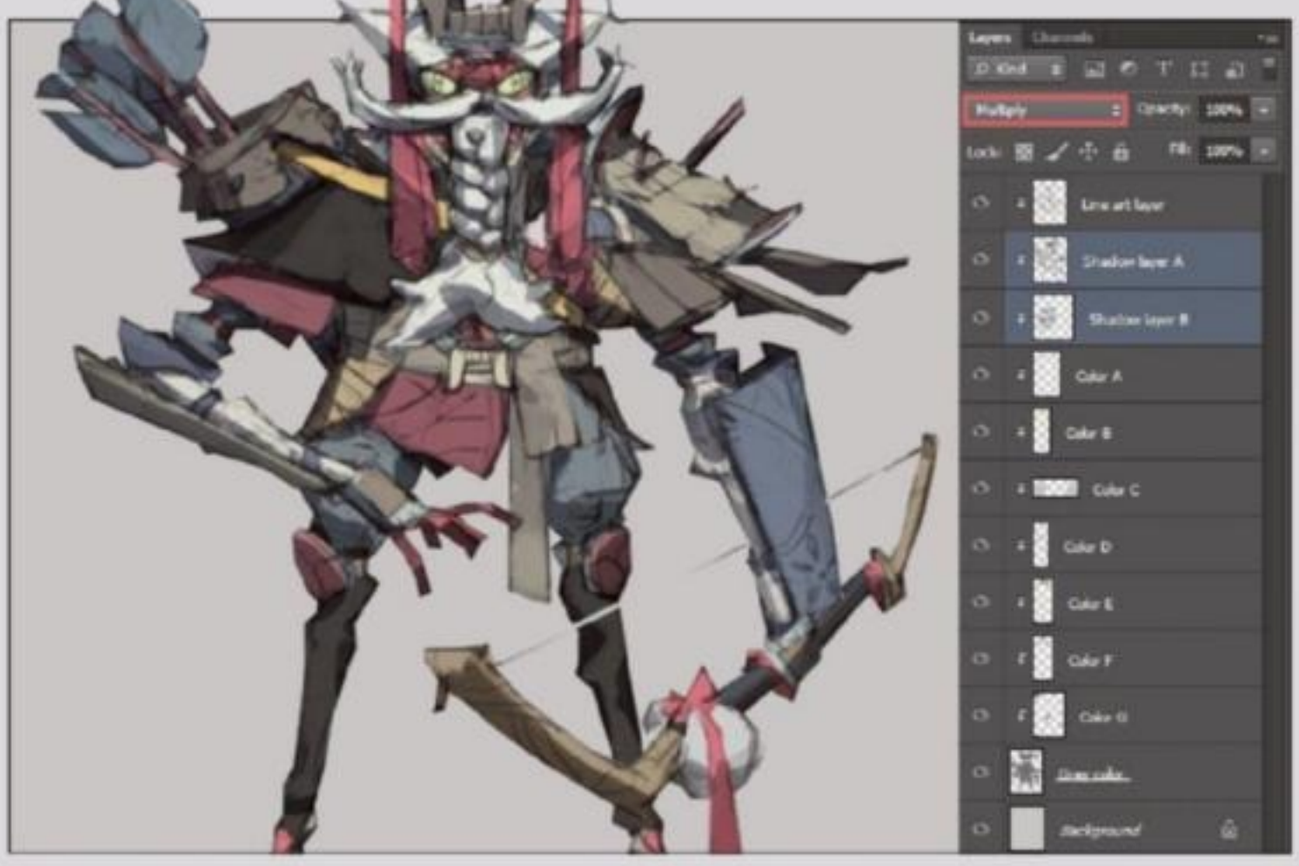
NOISE BRUSH

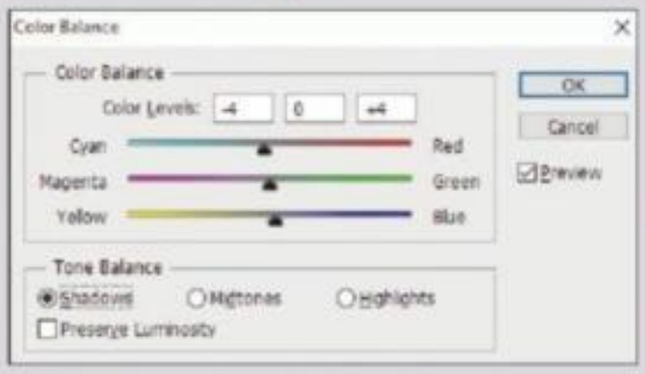
I use this brush with the Dodge tool. It creates a simple noise texture.



4 Defining the base colour

I then create layers for base colours (each layer consists of one or two similar colours) under the line art layer. After that, I make adjustments to each layer using the Hue/Saturation tool until I'm happy with the result. I find this method convenient and enjoyable, especially when you want to do colour variations for your character.



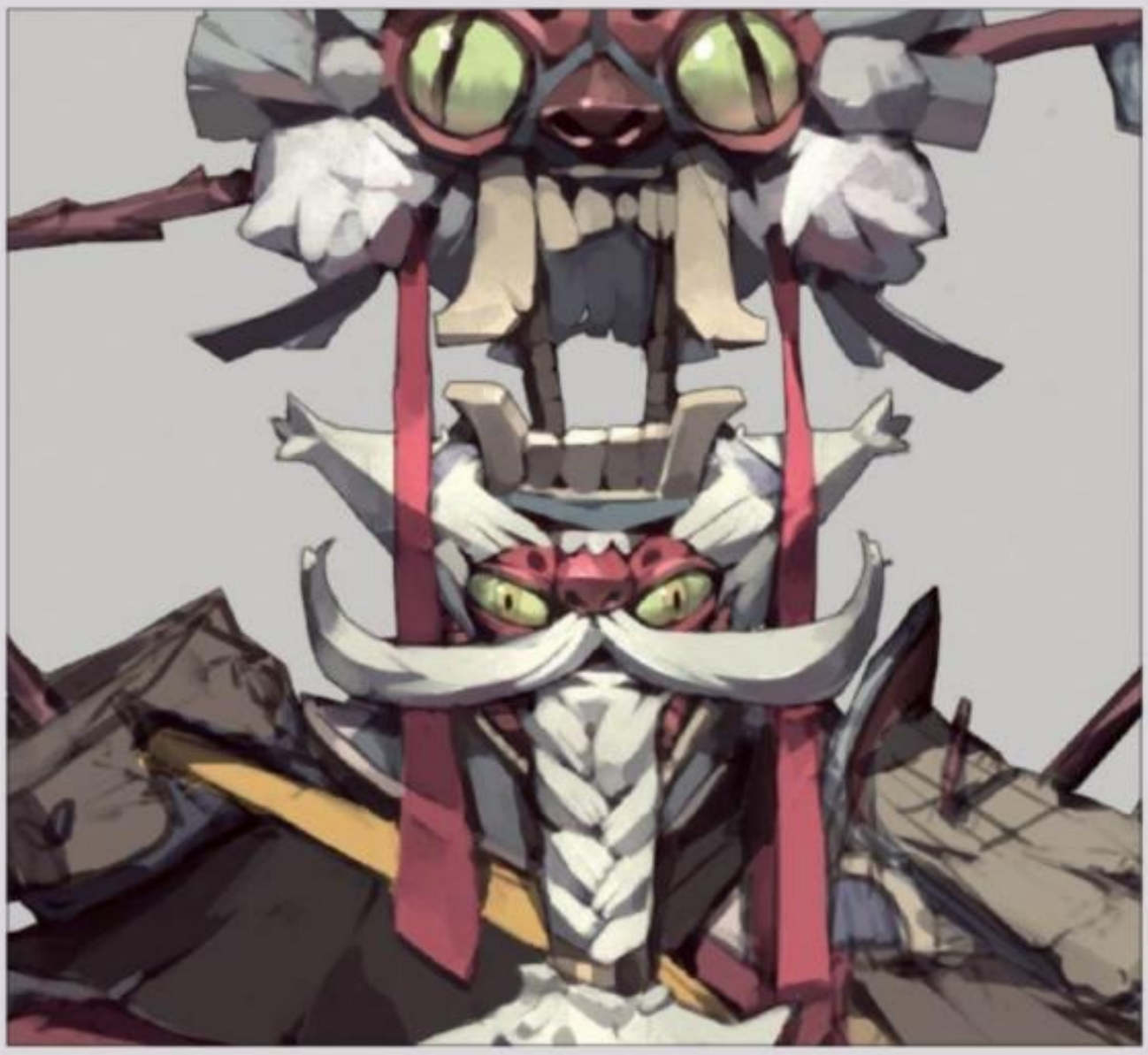


5 Shadow and finalising colours

I create another layer on top of the base colour layers and set the blending mode to Multiply. I use a colour with 50 per cent Lightness and low saturation for this shadow layer. Using a brush with varied Opacity, I can create different shades of shadow. (You can always create another Multiply layer on top if you need more depth on the shadow.) After some adjustments on base colour layers, I merge all the layers together. Then I make another colour adjustment using Color Balance (Image>Adjustment>Color Balance). This is primarily to unify the overall colour.

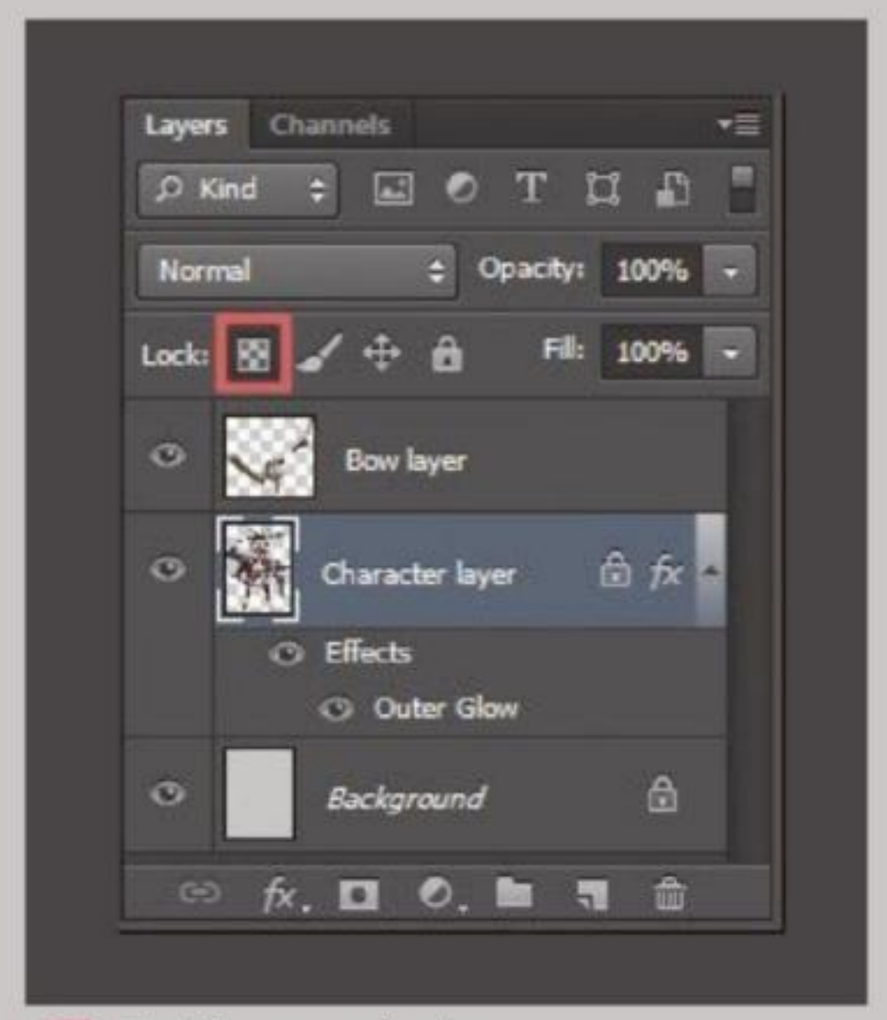
6 Character's face

From here it's all about rendering the whole thing. I love to start from the face because it's the most important part of a character. I think the face has the biggest influence over the art style and it determines the direction you are going for (funny, serious, cool, cute…). To lighten up a certain area, I use Dodge tool with my Noise brush, which gives the area some noise texture.



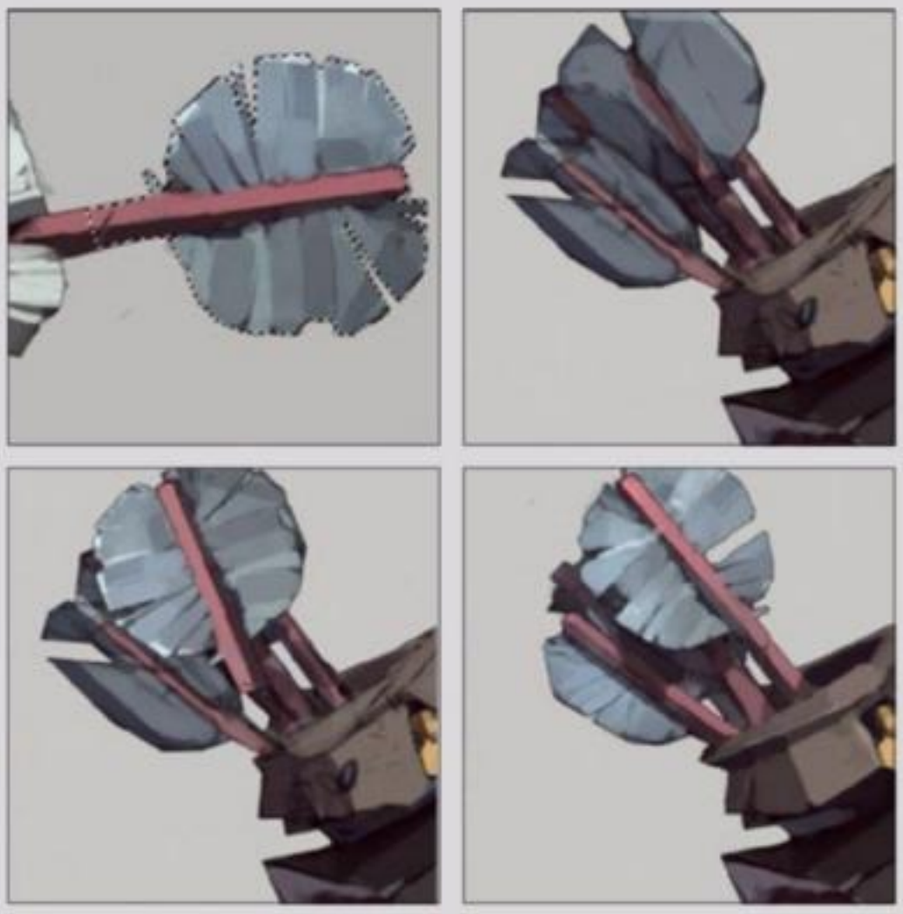
7 Rendering masks and arms

Because this is a Japanese-themed character, I emphasise the design of the ghost masks on his head and waist. I give the eyes on top of his head a glossy surface to make the mask look lively. The mask on his waist is actually his belt buckle. To me, hands are important. Much like the face, they're the areas of a figure that the viewer will focus on, especially in a composition like this where most of the body parts are obscured.



8 Further rendering

I render the rest of the character. At this stage I only focus on polishing the surfaces and cleaning the outlines. Having the whole character on a single layer enables me to make shape adjustment using the Warp and Liquify tools. Crucially, I can lock transparent pixels on it, which is a huge help especially when I'm painting the sharp edges of my character. I use the Smudge tool to blend colours on bigger surfaces.



9 Bow, quiver and arrows

Digital art comes into its own when it comes to repeated items (in this case, the arrow fletches). I simply paint the one that's on top of his head and duplicate it for the rest. But make sure you make some changes after duplicating them, so they're not identical. Furthermore, add some volume to the thin surfaces such as the feathers, fabric and strings so that they don't look too flat.

10 Be selective with small details

Now that I have all the lines and rough surfaces cleaned up, it's time to apply smaller details and patterning to the character. Elements such as scratches on hard surfaces and wrinkles on fabric are useful, but try not to overdo them. It's fine to leave some big surfaces blank: these empty spaces will set the small details off, by making them more noticeable.

PRO SECRETS

Don't push it too hard

After working on the same image for a long time, you might notice that something's wrong with it, but may not know exactly what the problem is. In situations like this, I'd take a break, go for a walk or play some video games, then come back to look at the image with fresh eyes.

11 Cast a shadow or two

Let's not forget about the shadows cast by the objects we just added. Correctly placed cast shadows are important because they help make your image look more convincing. Next, I divide the objects into different visual planes to create greater depth of field for the image. For example, the character's right arm is in the foreground so its colour should be more solid compared to his right leg.

12 Character brightness adjustment

At this stage I'm pretty satisfied with the character. But taking a step back from the image I realise that the focus of the image is no longer on the points that I originally had in mind. To fix this, first I duplicate the character layer and lower its brightness and saturation. After that, with a Soft-edge brush, I erase the areas that I want to pop. The same applies to the bow layer.

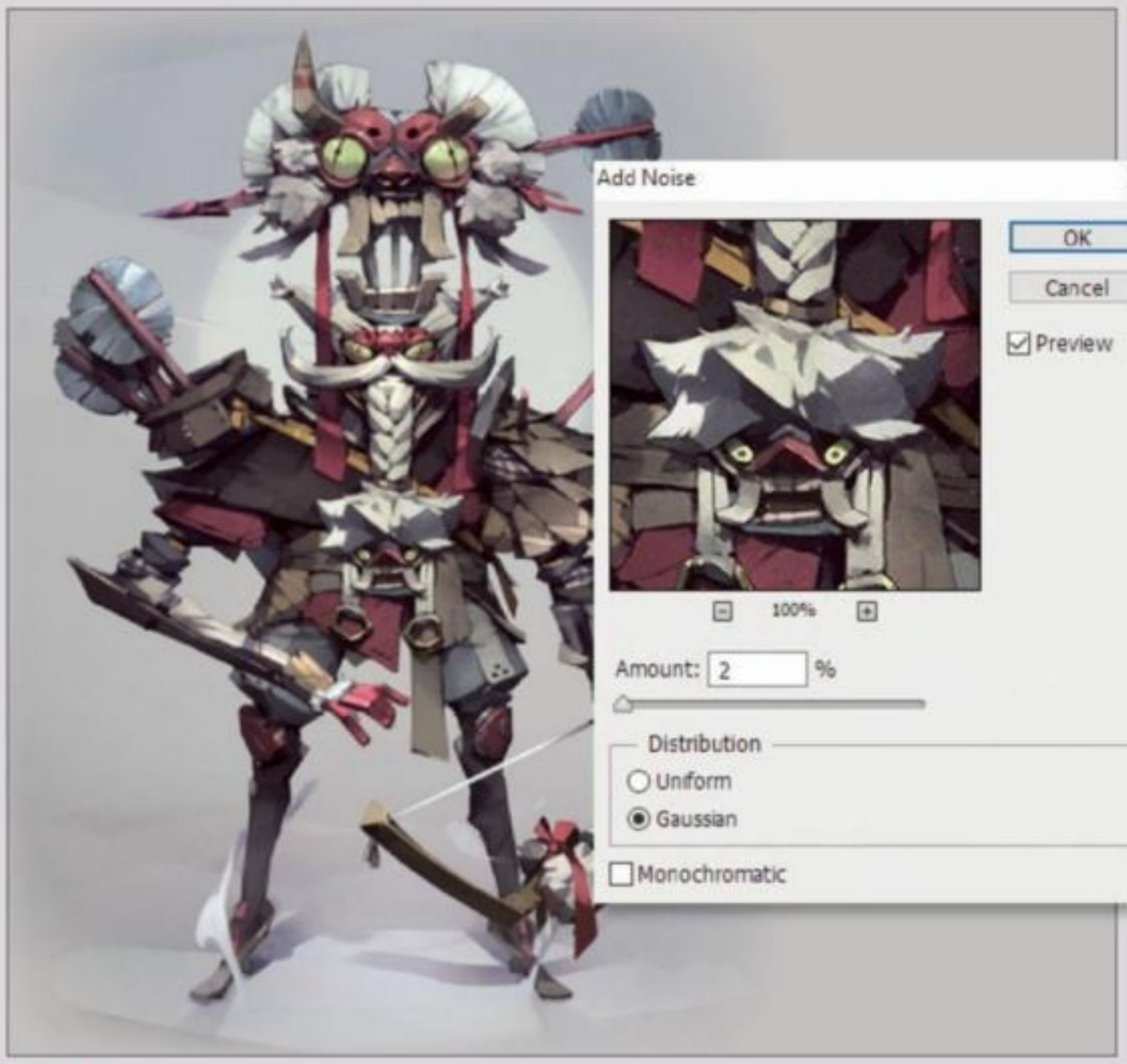
PRO SECRETS

Get blending

Blending modes come in very handy as a Layer or Brush effect. The ones I use often are Multiply, Color Dodge and Overlay. Multiply is commonly used to darken certain areas, but it can also be used to add to the saturation value if you set the colour's lightness to 100 per cent. Color Dodge is the perfect tool to paint bright surfaces and apply specular highlights.

13 Simple background

To draw attention to the face area, I create a simple background with a bright circle behind his head. I also add cast shadows on the ground to solidify the image.



14 Finishing up

To wrap things up, I apply a bit of contrast and atmospheric lighting on the character to make the scene more interesting. I also rasterise the Layer style, use the Smudge tool to blur some areas at the back and apply a noise filter. This concludes the workshop, I hope you enjoyed it! Be sure to check out my video of the painting process, which you can download or watch on ImagineFX's YouTube channel.

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX Reviews

Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receives the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

The latest art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

SOFTWARE

92 ZBrush 4R8
A quick refresh, or new tools a-plenty… we find out if it's worth upgrading to the latest version of the 3D sculpting software.

TRAINING

95 Space Princess
Illustrator Craig Elliott explains how he paints a member of galactic royalty, revealing plenty of tips in the process.

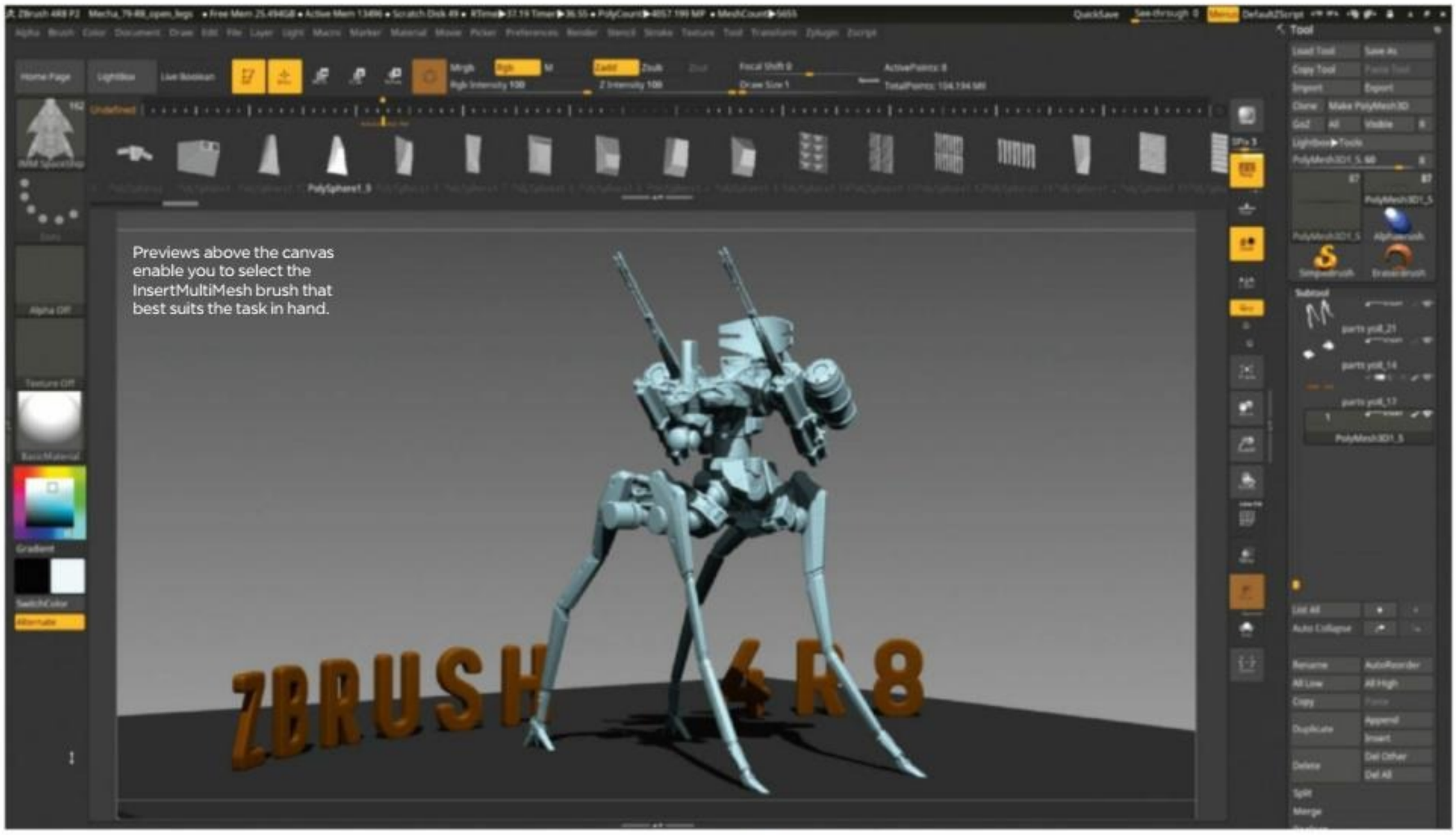
BOOKS

96 Kirby: King of Comics
This updated tribute to the work of Jack Kirby is bursting with classic comic art and enthusiasm for the ground-breaking artist.

97 Animation: The Global History
If you're after a detailed, academic-minded overview of animation through history, then look no further.

97 Steven Universe: Art & Origins
Get an insight into the genesis and making of this quirky animated show, created by one of the writers of Adventure Time.

RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ Magnificent ★★★★ Great ★★★ Good ★★ Poor ★ Atrocious



ZBrush 4R8

MAC & PC

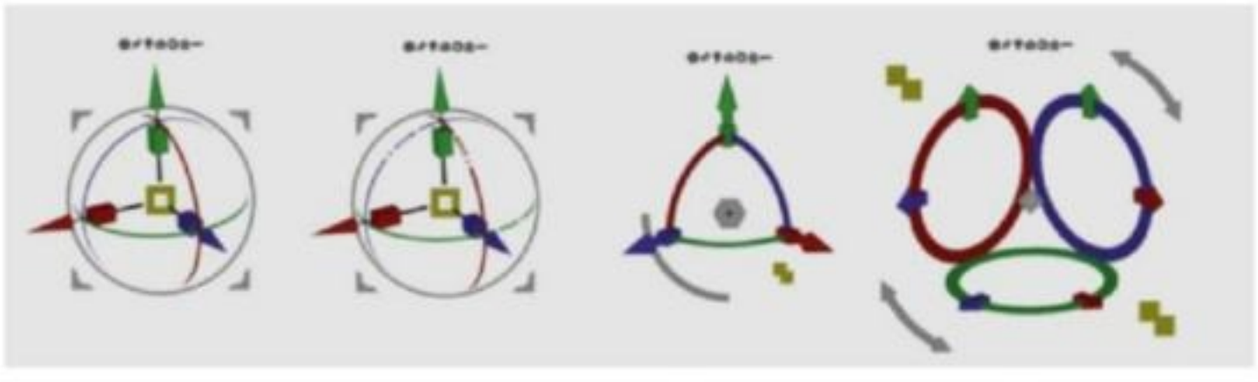
PURE GENIUS Pixologic's flagship product features new tools that help empower artists to create in ways they never thought possible

Price £618 **Company** Pixologic, Inc. **Web** www.pixologic.com

ZBrush is an asset creation application for 3D artists. It's used in almost every blockbuster film, AAA game and collectibles product, and is a key part of many other industries. However, ZBrush is also a powerful tool for 2D artists, who can use it to generate images that portray an object from any viewpoint, before either being rendered natively to have a 2D appearance, or exported and painted over in a 2D program.

Several challenges that 2D artists face which take a lot of time and effort – such as iteration, perspective, mechanical or biological complexity, and light and shadow rendering – are easily and quickly performed in ZBrush. Key to the program's strengths are its ability to manipulate millions of polygons to create almost any shape, be it an organic dragon or a hard-surface mech.

> "The program's strengths lie in its ability to manipulate millions of polygons"

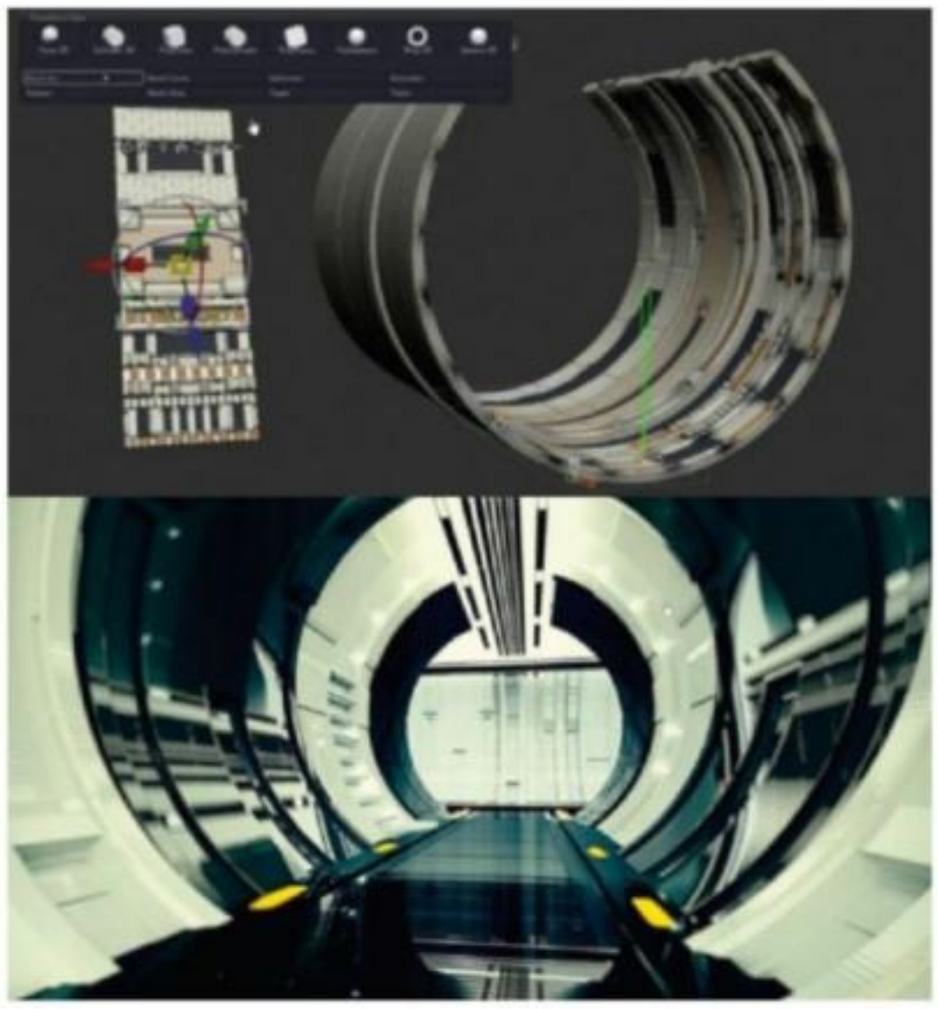


You can choose one of the many supplied versions of the 3D Gizmo, customise them, or create your own from scratch.

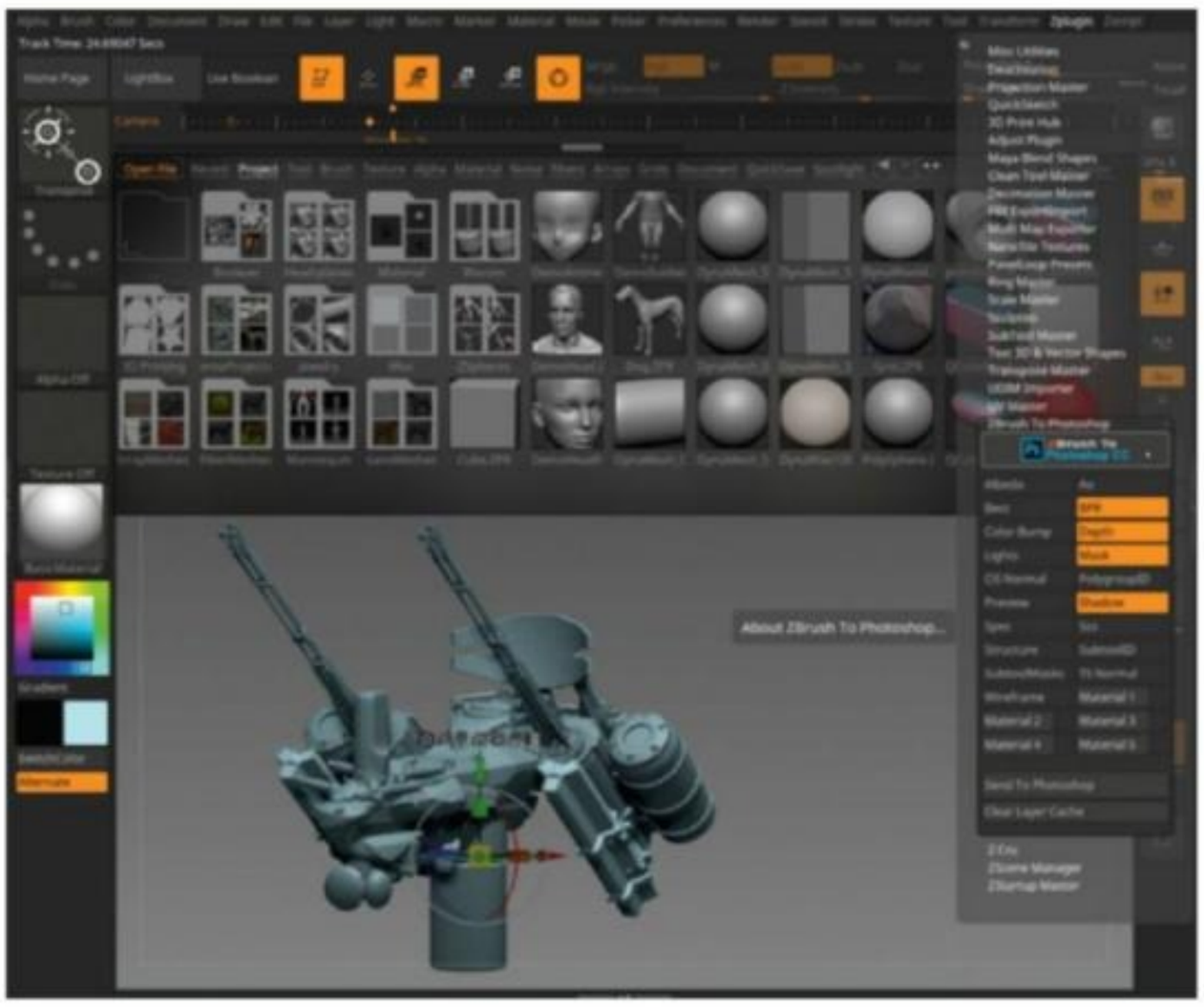
Every version of ZBrush tries to breaks new ground, and 4R8 continues this trend by introducing some phenomenal new capabilities that empower artists to be creative in hitherto unimagined ways. Such new techniques include the ability to add, subtract and intersect multiple objects to obtain shapes in real-time and produce the intended result or even some happy accidents. Boolean operations have been in 3D applications for a long time; however, the ability to work on multiple high polycount meshes shines in 4R8 and the possibilities are almost endless.

The addition of the Gizmo 3D feature makes moving, rotating and scaling objects easy and precise and more importantly, accessible to users who are new to 3D art and ZBrush in particular. Combining all three transformation options in one tool, together with the ability to transform

Using LightCap configurations or MatCap materials you can give your 3D objects and designs a decent 2D painted appearance.



Artist Solomon Blair has used Deformations to manipulate shapes, such as turning a planar wall to a rounded one.



You can transform all visible SubTools at once using the Gizmo. The LightBox comes with plenty of new starter content and all the plug-ins have been updated for 4R8, including the ZBrush to Photoshop CC plug-in.

multiple SubTools at once is a welcome time-saver. Another powerful new option is Deformation, which enables you to precisely bend, twist, taper and curve objects to produce original, compelling and dynamic results.

Alpha 3D makes it possible to build a library of shapes that can be applied to any surface, and the use of vector displacement technology allows for 3D alphas that can have overhangs and undercuts. ZBrush 4R8 also adds the ability to create 3D text, and coupled with the deformers, can be bent and shaped into interesting forms and, of course, sculpted on directly. The interface has been refreshed to look crisper on higher-resolution monitors, and you can now switch between seven languages.

These are only some of the new features that add to an already rich collection of powerful and innovative tools, which further strengthens the argument that ZBrush could form part of every digital artist's toolkit. Put simply, the program enables fantastic levels of creativity and vision. And the fact that Pixologic offers all upgrades, including ZBrush 4R8, free to its existing users makes it great value and a sound investment.

DETAILS

Features
- Live Boolean operations with multiple SubTools
- Gizmo 3D, Deformation and Interactive primitives
- Transform multiple tools at once
- Updated scalable UI
- Lazy Mouse 2.0
- 3D text and vector shape creator
- Plug-in updates including ZBrush to Photoshop CC

System Requirements
PC: 64-Bit Windows Vista, 7, 8 or 10, Intel i5/i7/Xeon or AMD CPU, 8GB RAM, 100GB drive space, Wacom or compatible pen tablet, 1,920x 1,080 monitor
Mac: OSX 10.8 or above. Intel i5/i7/Xeon CPU, 8GB RAM, 100GB drive space, Wacom or compatible pen tablet, 1,920x1,080 monitor

Rating
★★★★★

ARTIST INTERVIEW

TONY LEONARD

The concept artist reveals how he uses ZBrush's tools

You come from a 2D background, so what got you into using ZBrush?
ZBrush captured my attention back around 2008, when I started working in video games at Game Republic. I was looking for a tool that would be perfect for entry-level 3D, to better flush out ideas that I was all too used to putting down in 2D, but had always wanted to build in 3D. Digital clay was the way to go, for sure!

How do you use ZBrush in your 2D workflow?
Generally, there are two ways: create a more detailed render of a model/sculpt for use with paint-overs, and now as a tool to block out otherwise complex drawings where a 3D assist would benefit from hand-drawn detail – such as a detailed mecha design, or environmental elements.

How does ZBrush 4R8 make you more productive?
It would normally take time to produce a complex object while maintaining perspective. Version 4R8, with its intuitive and easy workflows, means that I can model, bash out and concept an idea fairly quickly with even the simplest of modelling tools. What would otherwise have taken me a lot of painstaking drawing and layout, now ends up taking a fraction of the time.

As a teacher, what are the basics you recommend that a beginner starts with?
The core idea my students learn is how to work with forms. Start by blocking out, and then think about a first, second and tertiary workflow approach to building up forms from rough to refined.

Tony is a 2D/3D concept artist. He's worked at Game Republic and taught at Nagoya Communications Arts Gakuin.

www.instagram.com/tonikoro/

| THE WORLD'S LEADING DESIGN MAG |

VIDEO INSIGHT

SIX BRAND IMPACT AWARDS JUDGES SHARE THEIR WISDOM

COMPUTER ARTS

DESIGN MATTERS

ISSUE #270
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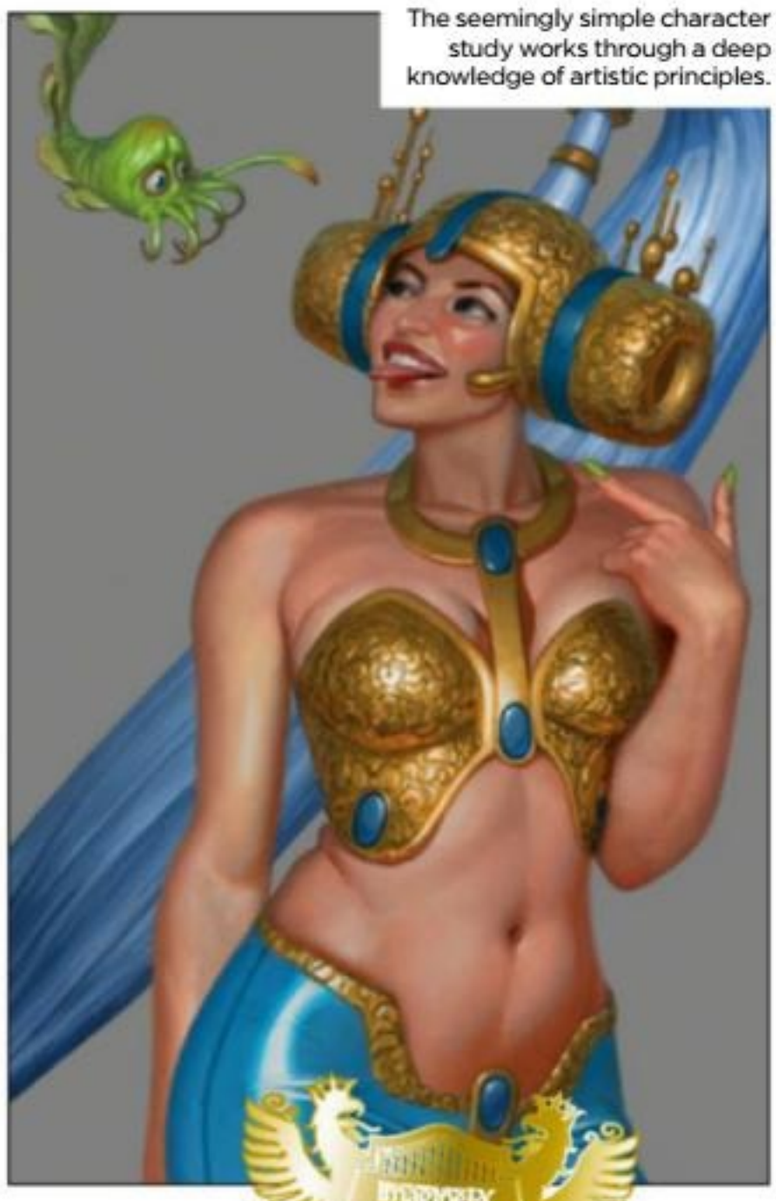
DESIGN MATTERS

Craig starts with a mechanical pencil line drawing, then goes through the basic painting quickly, choosing to focus on the detailing.



The seemingly simple character study works through a deep knowledge of artistic principles.

The gold creates multiple challenges for Craig, from realistic texturing to bounce light effects.

Craig discusses how the anatomy of the legs and the knees affects the folds on the leggings.

Communicating personality is an important part of any character-based piece, stresses Craig.

Space Princess

DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE Artist Craig Elliott paints a straightforward character study – then explains why it's not so straightforward after all

Publisher Craig Elliott **Price** £12 (DVD), £8 (download) **Format** DVD/download **Web** www.craigelliottgallery.com

Looked at one way, Craig Elliott's tutorial on the painting of a classic sci-fi space princess couldn't be more simple. Starting with a mechanical pencil line drawing, he blocks out the colours, then gets into rendering form and detail until he feels he's done enough. There's no background, only a few different textures to paint, and just one extra element: a small alien for the princess to engage with. Basic stuff, right?

The beauty of this video, though – and the reason why you'll want to watch it through more than once – is the deep knowledge that Craig drops into his voiceover. He peels back the layers of his thought process as he paints, revealing all the factors that he has to take into account to achieve a convincing result on the canvas.

Craig's process is as much about physics as it about art. He talks at length about the different surfaces he's painting – skin, hair, gold, gemstones and the princess's latex-like leggings – and how they respond to light differently. Sub-surface scattering (the effect where light passes and shifts colour through thin edges) plays its part, too.

There are also multiple light sources to consider, even on this apparently basic pose. Craig talks you through the interaction of a blue-ish light from the sky and materials like the gold helmet and accessories, which create warmer bounce lights. All of this adds colour highlights in areas such as the bare arms, and affects the hues in the shadow areas.

Not every discussion is this technical: Craig is great on the topic of bringing out the personality of your subject, and also meditates on the role of the artist in an era dominated by photographic imagery.

Particularly if you haven't been painting long or you're self-taught rather going through art college, you'll discover so many concepts in this couple of hours that will fuel your creative journey well into the future.

DETAILS

Topics covered
- Line drawing
- Blocking out
- Basic rendering
- Materials and textures
- Bounce light effects
- Shadow hue and intensity
- Texture in digital brushes
- Anatomy and clothing
- Painting vs photography

Length
134 minutes

Rating
★★★★★

ARTIST PROFILE

CRAIG ELLIOTT

Craig is an artist based in Los Angeles, creating fine art as well as working on animated films Hercules, Mulan, The Emperor's New Groove and Monsters vs Aliens, and even getting involved in landscape architecture, sculpture and jewellery. His influences include classic American illustrators, Japanese scroll painting and woodblock prints, and the great artists of Europe. Prevalent themes in his personal work include body image, environmental preservation, and psychological and social repression.

Photo by Greg Preston

www.craigelliottgallery.com

BLACK MAGIC
CAT PEOPLE!
THE STRANGE WORLD OF
TRUE YOUR DREAMS
What do they mean—the messages received in sleep?
WE WILL BUY YOUR DREAMS! (See details inside.)

Kirby: King of Comics

FITTING TRIBUTE A must for any fan of classic superhero comics, this tribute to Jack Kirby fizzles with energy, passion and amazing art

ImagineFX ARTIST'S CHOICE

Author Mark Evanier **Publisher** Abrams **Price** £18 **Web** www.ambramscomicarts.com **Available** Now

We've all been influenced by Jack Kirby, whether we know it or not. Known in the industry as the King of Comics, the New York artist was responsible for creating or co-creating some of the best-known characters of the 20th century, including Captain America, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four and The Mighty Thor. And to those who followed he was basically a god.

Reading his strips as a youngster, author Mark Evanier was typically hooked, describing the experience as "like sticking needles into an electric socket". In a perfect world, he says, we'd all be able to walk around a huge museum of Jack's art, but instead "you will have to settle for this book." Thankfully, as consolation prizes go, it's a pretty darned fine one.

A revised edition of the 2008 original, part of the reason this book works so well is Mark's unadulterated joy for his subject. "Jack Kirby made comics move, he made them buzz and crash and explode," he writes, in an excitable tone that continues throughout. And his curation of Jack's art is similarly inspired. We've seen many compilations of comic art in book form before, but we can't recall one quite so packed and full of varied and superlative work.

Author Mark Evanier was a friend of Jack, and so had access to original artwork, such as this panel from The Fighting American.

> "We can't recall a comic art compilation quite so packed and full of superlative work"

There's a staggering amount of classic strips and cover art on show, and most pieces are awarded the full-page treatment that they deserve. The selection never gets repetitive either. We get a host of rare treats, including Jack's caricatures of contemporary celebrities, from Joan Crawford to Henry Ford; a social-realist strip called Street Code, about the ugliness of city life; early newspaper cartoons; and comic strips about cowboys, Indians and romantic love.

But what we're most interested in, of course, are the superheroes, and there's plenty of that to go round too, from well-known titles to rarer stuff like the wartime Fighting American and early 70s creation The New Gods. There's both finished work and behind-the-scenes art. Included in the latter are rough sketches and cover mockups, plastered in original, scribbled notes for improvement.

In 1968/69 Jack drew up new Asgard character designs. Thor gained a similar outlandish treatment.

The new edition is rounded off with a short chapter dealing with events since the publication of the first book, notably Jack's death and court battles over unpaid royalties. It's a bit of a downer to end on, but it won't last for long, because this is a book you'll find yourself dipping into again and again.

RATING ★★★★★

Animation: the Global History

FULLY COMPREHENSIVE This academically focused, hugely detailed guide to the history of animation leaves no stone unturned

Author Maureen Furniss **Publisher** Thames & Hudson **Price** £35 **Web** www.thamesandhudson.com **Available** Now

This book is billed as the "first comprehensive history of international animation". While that might sound like marketing overreach, it's actually fair comment. This 466-page tome covers every area of animation, from the magic lantern era right through to modern video games, in immense detail.

There's a huge amount of background material, too. This helps you to fully understand not just what animators made but the cultural and political influences that informed them, from the modernist movement in painting to the rise of trade unions. Nor is it overly US-focused, with seemingly every country getting a look in.

The book covers the Disney renaissance in the late 80s/early 90s, as exemplified by 1991's Beauty and the Beast.

Do note, though, that the text is dense and highly academic (the author teaches at CalArts). Thankfully, it's beautifully designed and packed with colourful visuals. These are cleverly selected and really help to make the book fun to dip in and out of. You're unlikely to ever read it end to end, but as an all-bases-covered reference guide to the history of animation, there's little to beat it.

RATING ★★★★☆

Steven Universe: Art & Origins

UNIVERSAL APPEAL From the maker of Adventure Time, Steven Universe has become another cult hit – and now it's spawned this informative art book

Author Chris McDonnell **Publisher** Abrams **Price** £20 **Web** www.ambramscomicarts.com **Available** Now

Launched in 2010, Cartoon Network's Adventure Time proved adult cartoons didn't have to be either rude or satirical to be popular. They can just be daft, childlike and surreal.

In 2013, a former writer and storyboard artist on the show, Rebecca Sugar, created a similar cartoon called Steven Universe. Now in its fifth season, fans will be overjoyed with this book about the art behind it.

Art & Origins has a level of deep-dive detail we've rarely seen in similar TV tie-ins.

You can feel the maker's devotion sing through the Q&As, which reveal how the show is put together. These are accompanied by a huge and enticing array of concept art, production samples, early sketches and storyboards, with useful and informative captioning throughout.

So on one page, you find intricate guides to the inking and construction guides to lead characters. Then on another, you get Rebecca's key drawings of Ruby and Sapphire's makeup embrace from the episode Keystone Motel.

All in all, the whole book feels a lot like Steven Universe itself: colourful, offbeat, slightly crazy in places, but ultimately a rewarding experience that leaves your heart a little bit happier.

RATING ★★★★★

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

This issue:

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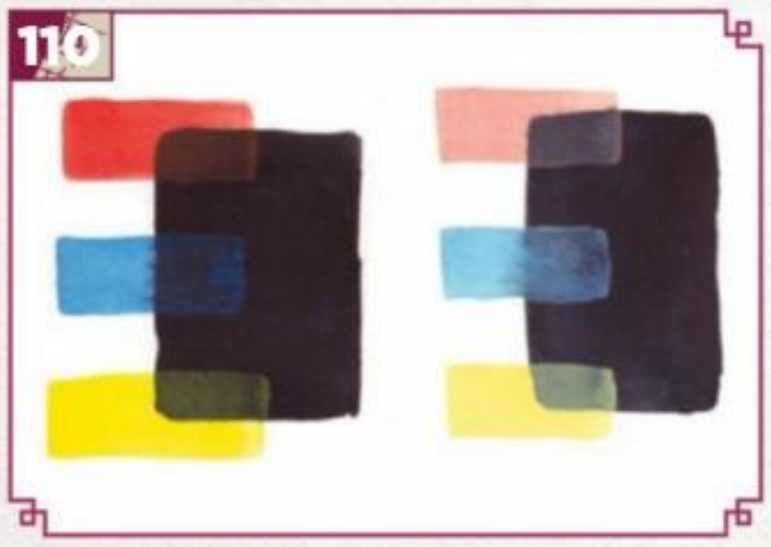
Artwork from some of the finest traditional artists around today.

104 Sculpt and glaze clay faerie houses
Vicky Stonebridge throws down some clay, then sculpts and details, before firing and glazing a set of houses for faeries.

110 Core Skills: Gouache layering and workarounds
Layer your colours effectively and avoid common gouache pitfalls – Laura Bifano explains all.

114 First Impressions: Tiffany England
The children's book and fantasy illustrator talks about wanting to connect to people via her art.



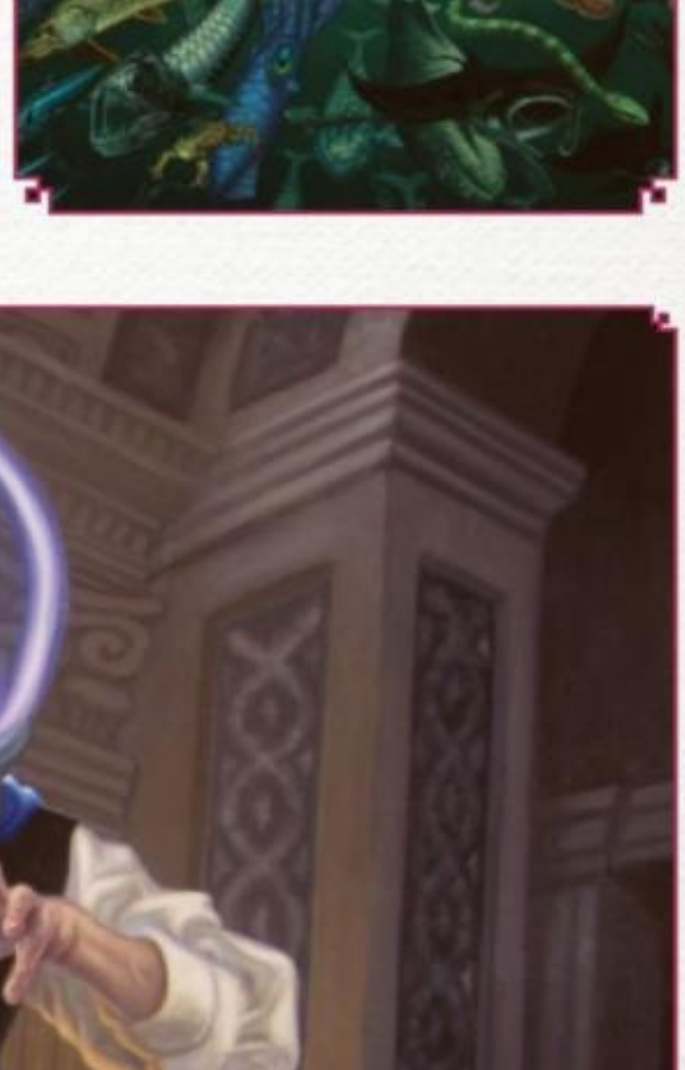
FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Craig Maher

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Oils **WEB:** www.craigmaher.net

Craig lives in New York's Hudson Valley. He helped build the first ever online multiplayer game, The Kingdom of Drakkar, and now paints narrative art.



1 CERULEAN LEAGUE
"This is me having fun fusing the drama of wizards in cloaks with old sci-fi pulp-inspired bubble 'helmets' and elaborate chrome armour."

2 TREAD
"A personal painting showing the dark waters of a northern New York lake unfolding into the darker oceans of the subconscious."

3 FIRSTBORN
"A painting illustrating a story by Brandon Sanderson with an interesting twist: all the action takes place on a holographic command deck."

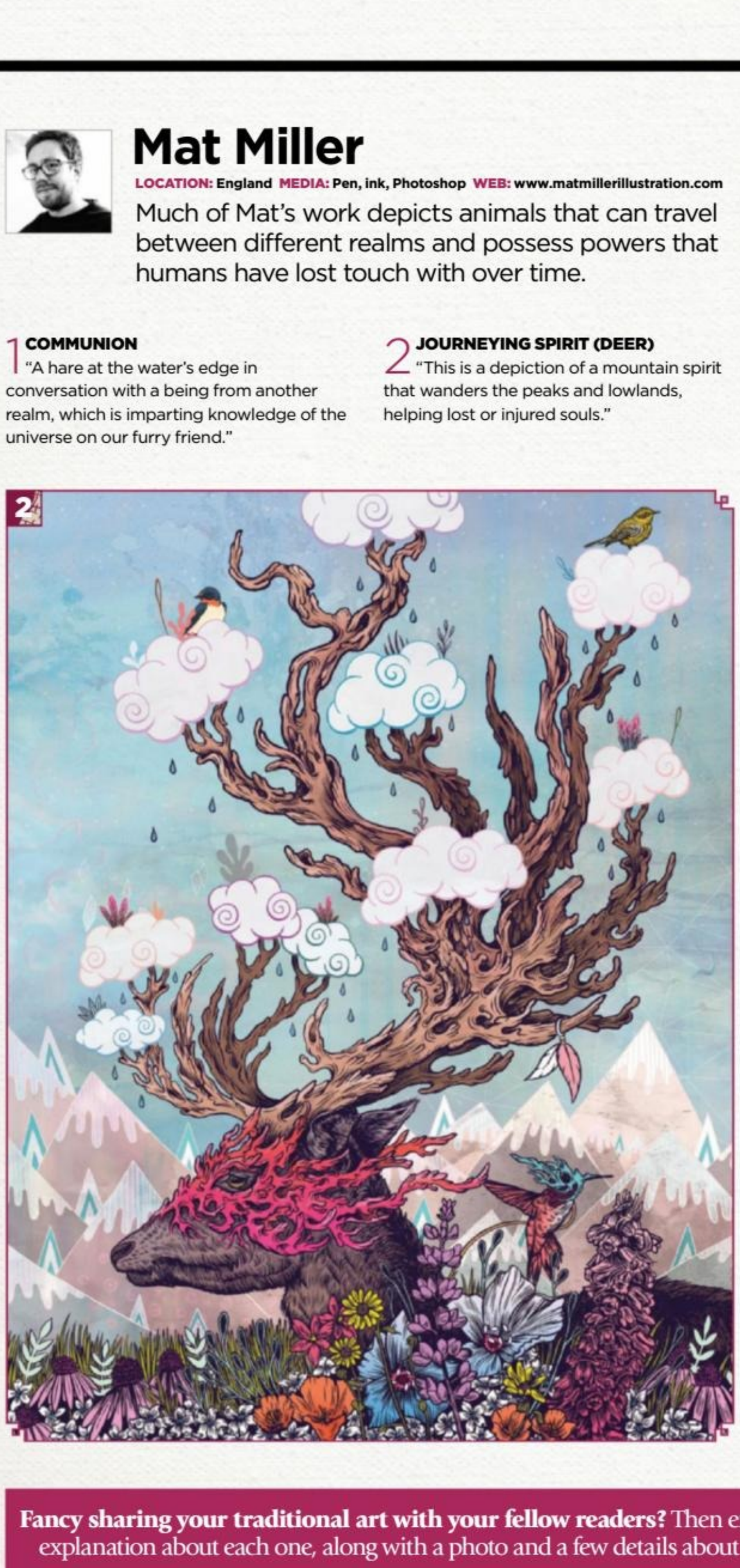
Mat Miller

LOCATION: England **MEDIA:** Pen, ink, Photoshop **WEB:** www.matmillerillustration.com

Much of Mat's work depicts animals that can travel between different realms and possess powers that humans have lost touch with over time.

1 COMMUNION
"A hare at the water's edge in conversation with a being from another realm, which is imparting knowledge of the universe on our furry friend."

2 JOURNEYING SPIRIT (DEER)
"This is a depiction of a mountain spirit that wanders the peaks and lowlands, helping lost or injured souls."



3 THE LAST MERMAID
"This mermaid is the last of her kind but revered among all ocean life. She has great sympathy for the humans above, for how careless they are with each other and their environment."

4 JOURNEYING SPIRIT (BEAR)
"This forest warden spirit appears to be quite angry at something – probably humans, for trespassing on his lands and destroying the forest."

Fancy sharing your traditional art with your fellow readers? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each one, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to **fxpose@imaginefx.com**

Clay

SCULPT AND GLAZE CLAY FAERIE HOUSES

VICKY STONEBRIDGE demonstrates her potter's wheel skills, as she throws down some clay, sculpts and details, then fires and glazes a set of houses for faeries

During my childhood I wandered the Scottish hills, looking for fairies and being afraid that they might find me! It's great fun to make something based on the stories that influenced me.

I use a potter's wheel to create the main body of the house in this workshop, but hand-making techniques such as slab building or coiling would work just as well. It takes a lot of practice, but once mastered it's the fastest way of creating cylindrical shapes from clay. I like to do warm-ups and throw experimental shapes just to relax after a day's production throwing.

The fairy houses comprise three shapes: the chimney, roof and main house. I throw them 'off the hump', which is one centred lump of clay, because it's easier than centring three pieces of clay. And after the technical work, the decorative fun starts. It's a matter of waiting for the parts to dry to the right consistency to stick them together. I want them soft enough to stick and squeeze together, but not so soft that they warp or buckle.

The details and cutting out windows and doors takes place over the next two or three days. I use damp cloths, a water spray and plastic bags to slow things down, or just put them outside in the sun for a short while to speed things up.

Then they're ready to paint. I have to be bold when I glaze, because any detail is lost at high temperatures, so I have fun and then wait for the results!

ARTIST INSIGHT

KILN LOADING

Kiln loading is an important skill. The distribution of weight, how items are stacked in the bisque, and ensuring that they don't touch each other or the kiln sides during the glaze firing, are all vital considerations.

Vicky runs a teaching Pottery studio near Lochcarron in the Scottish Highlands. She produces sculptural and functional pieces inspired by mountain scenery, mythology and folklore. You can see her work at www.balnacra.com

MATERIALS

BUFF CLAY BODY
- Stoneware glazes
- Matt oatmeal
- Old pink
- Marbled blue
- Frog green
- Matt blue

OXIDES
- Cobalt carbonate
- Yellow iron oxide
- Copper

EQUIPMENT
- L&L Easy-Fire electric kiln (model number e18S-eu-230)
- Potter's wheel

1 Preparing the clay

It's vital to prepare clay properly. I start with clay slurry and put it dry on plaster slabs, mixing it frequently as it dries. When it's dry enough to knead, I put it through my pug mill two or three times. I seal it in plastic bags and then 'wedge' it by hand again before using it.

2 Throwing – centring the clay

Centring is the most important part of throwing on the wheel: everything will be off-centre and out of control otherwise. My favourite method is to lock my arms into my sides, push the clay down, then squeeze in the sides to cone the clay up, and repeat. This forces the clay in on itself, and requires a degree of strength.

3 Forming the chimney

I form a small lump of clay on the top of my centred clay – this will be the fairy house chimney. I make a thin cylinder by pushing one finger into the centre of the lump, then draw up the walls of the shape with fingers on the outside and inside, squeezing it thinner and taller, then cutting it off.

4 Developing the roof

Using the same lump of centred clay, I form another ball on the top, around the size of an apple. This will be an upside-down cone shape that forms the roof. I open it up with my thumbs, going down to the pointed base, then lift the walls up and out gently until it's wide and thin enough for my house.

5 Throwing the house base

For the main base of the house, I re-centre the remaining clay into a dome. I press my thumbs down in the centre to create the cylinder, and open out the flat base at the bottom of the inside. I then lift surplus clay from the bottom to the top in order to raise the form into a tall, thin shape.

6 Turning and trimming

When the parts of the fairy houses are cheese hard, I trim and turn them on the wheel, using tools to take away any surplus clay at the base and forming a neat foot. I shape the roof and chimney by hand, using a potter's knife and a damp sponge to soften rough edges.

GLAZING TIP

GET THE BEST RESULTS

Raw pottery glazes look nothing like the final results, so test all new glazes to know what to expect.

7 Sticking parts together

The parts of the fairy houses need sticking together before they become too dry to bond successfully. This avoids cracking, because the clay shrinks when it dries. I do this when they're leather hard: I score the edges being joined with a knife, then use wet clay 'slip' as a glue, before pressing them firmly together.

8 Adding structural detail

It's important to prevent the fairy houses from drying out too much, so I wrap them in plastic between stages. To start creating detail, I use more slip to stick strips of clay on to create window and door frames. I work intuitively at this stage, and enjoy watching the character of the houses take shape.

ARTIST INSIGHT

CLAY HARDENING AND TIMING

Pottery is all about timing. As the clay dries, do different jobs. Too soft or too hard will ruin your work. 'Cheese' or 'leather' hard is good for trimming and cutting out, and aim for slightly softer when sticking pieces together.

9 *Cutting out doors and windows*

Cutting out shapes from the pottery requires a very sharp scalpel, pin or thin knife. The clay needs to be leather hard to be neat and controlled. I carefully carve out random shapes to make window panes. I cut out a door and glue it back on in an open position so that a candle can be put inside.

10 *Introducing final details*

I use a damp sponge to rub around cut-out edges and soften them, taking great care because it's delicate at this stage. I then scratch in some surface detail and glue on dots to make flowers. I use a garlic press as an extruder to make thin strings of clay to glue on – my aim is for them to look like climbing plants.

CLAY TIP

WORKING IN BATCHES

A lot can go wrong during the pottery process, so don't become attached. Make extra to ensure something survives!

ARTIST INSIGHT

THROWING PRACTICE

Throwing pottery on the wheel isn't a skill that can be picked up overnight – it's like learning to drive or playing an instrument. The combination of hand, eye and body coordination takes practice and dedication – stick with it!

11 *Careful dying*

Once the fairy houses are finished, I take off their plastic coverings and give them a final wipe with a damp sponge or finger to smooth any rough parts. I dry them slowly in the shade to avoid warping and cracking as the drying clay shrinks. The dry greenware is very fragile, so I avoid any unnecessary handling.

12 *Bisque firing*

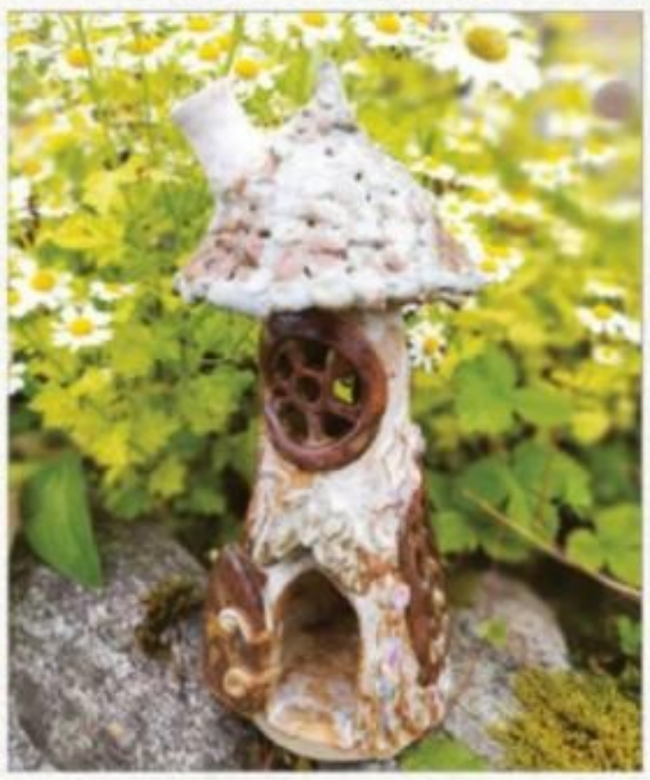
Pottery needs to be bone dry before going in the kiln for the first firing – any moisture left in will heat up, expand, turn to steam and make the pot explode! Once I'm sure that they're completely dry, I carefully load them into the kiln and fill up around them. This firing is called 'bisque' or 'biscuit firing'.

13 *Glazing the buildings*

After the bisque firing, the houses are ready for glaze painting. I use stoneware temperature glazes, but any glaze range will work. I dip, brush and use a slip trailer to apply the glaze. Then I paint and sponge some detail on with coloured oxides. I use wax resist to keep the bases clean and avoid it sticking on the kiln.

14 *Glazing firing*

Loading the glaze kiln is different to the bisque firing, because the glazed pottery mustn't touch anything else, or it'll stick and cause damage. I fire these houses to 124 degrees C, a mid-range temperature that gives subtle warm colours and a robust finish. It takes around seven hours to heat and another seven to cool.



15 *Finished fairy houses*

My favourite part is opening up a glaze kiln, because it's so exciting to see the results – what goes in looks so different to what comes out! I wait patiently for the fairy houses to cool before checking for sharp edges or blemishes, then photograph them, hug them and leave them in the woods for the fairies!

Core skills: Part 3

GOUACHE LAYERING & WORKAROUNDS

LAURA BIFANO continues her series in exploring the idiosyncrasies of gouache, explaining colour-layering basics and how to avoid some common pitfalls

The wonderful thing about gouache is its versatility. Unlike watercolour, it can be used in transparent washes or can be built up in thick painterly layers. But unlike say, oils and acrylics, layering can be a bit more tricky.

One of the most challenging things about working in gouache is knowing how colours will behave when layered on top of one another. Like any medium, a bit of trial and error is required before getting a grasp on the behaviours of the paint. Not only does the paint dry a shade or two lighter or darker than when applied, but often colours can lift off the paper and bleed into each stroke laid down on top. Although it can be more forgiving than watercolour, if you're not careful then your values can fall into the middle range, resulting in a chalky-looking image.

Furthermore, gouache also comes with all the challenges of working in any water-based medium. Often the moisture in both the paper and brush –as well as the viscosity of the paint itself – will affect how each brush stroke falls on the paper.

Here, I'll demonstrate how certain colours interact with one another, some cheats, some common mistakes and how to avoid them, and the pros and cons of working transparently/opaquely.

MATERIALS

PAINT
- M. Graham or Winsor & Newton gouache

BRUSHES
- Liner brush
- Large flat head brush
- Size six round sable

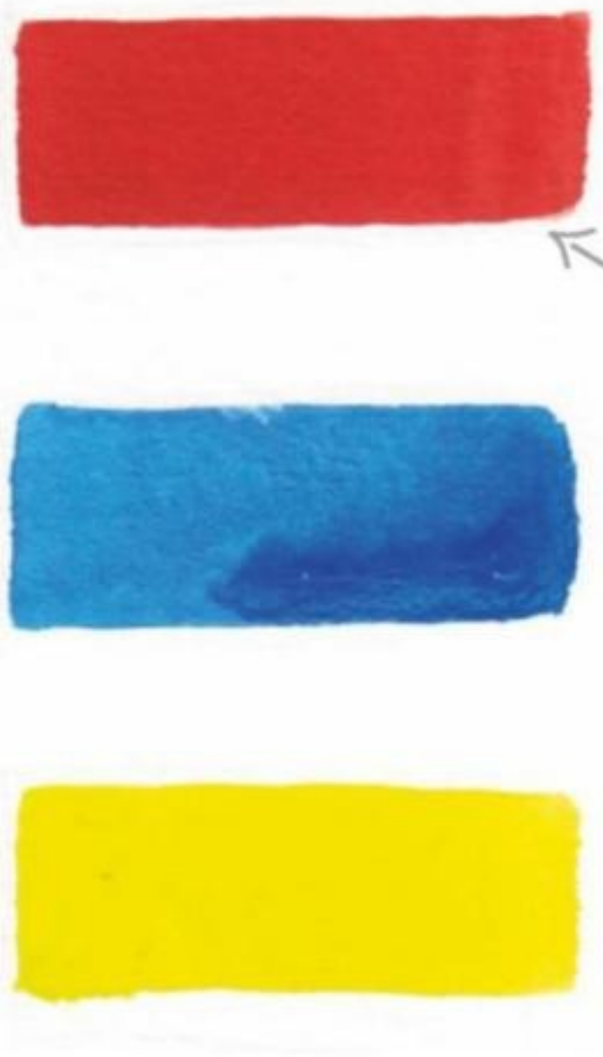
MISCELLANEOUS
- Mixing tray

Laura is an illustrator and production artist from Vancouver, BC. She's worked in film, TV and on children's books. See more at www.laurabifano.com.

1 *Some thoughts on layering*

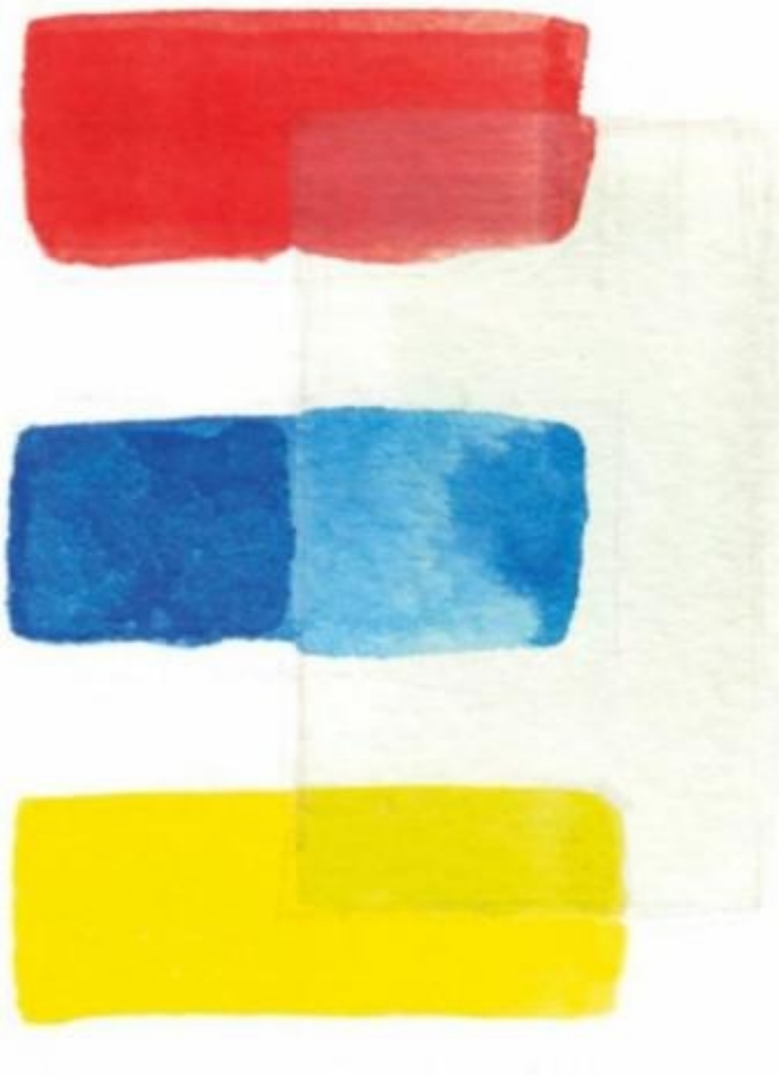
To get a better understanding of layering colours in gouache, we'll look at how some of them behave on light and dark values. In the four swatches, I've taken the primaries and laid them on top of the white of the paper, a wash of opaque titanium white, and black.

A PRIMARIES ON PAPER



The three swatches of primaries are at their brightest when laid directly over clean, white paper.

B OVER TITANIUM WHITE



In the second sample, you can see that the first wash of Titanium white affects the primaries that are laid on top. Where the two colours overlap, they look duller and slightly more desaturated than when applied directly to the paper.

C OVER BLACK

This desaturation is more obvious when laid over black. Although they were applied in a fairly thin wash, you can see that on their own, the primaries do display some degree of opacity.

The main observation that you can take from this is to avoid layering darker values over light paint. Save that tube of Titanium white for the final stages. And when layering lighter colours over darker ones, you may need to sacrifice some vibrancy in favour of opacity. Work in your midtones, then dark areas, and save the highlights for last.

D PRIMARIES WITH ADDED TITANIUM WHITE

In the fourth swatch I've added about 30 per cent Titanium white to the primaries, and you can see that they automatically have better coverage than before. Unfortunately, this comes at the cost of their saturation. If I were to apply this practically then I'd use a pure hue on the white of the paper, and add Titanium white for better coverage on dark areas.

2 *Avoiding paint pickup and bleed*

In the painting of the fish and the examples below, you can see the behaviour of paint when applied on surfaces of varying dampness. This affects the amount of bleed you'll see between colours as well as paint-lift. Each of these combinations can be used to your advantage... if done correctly.

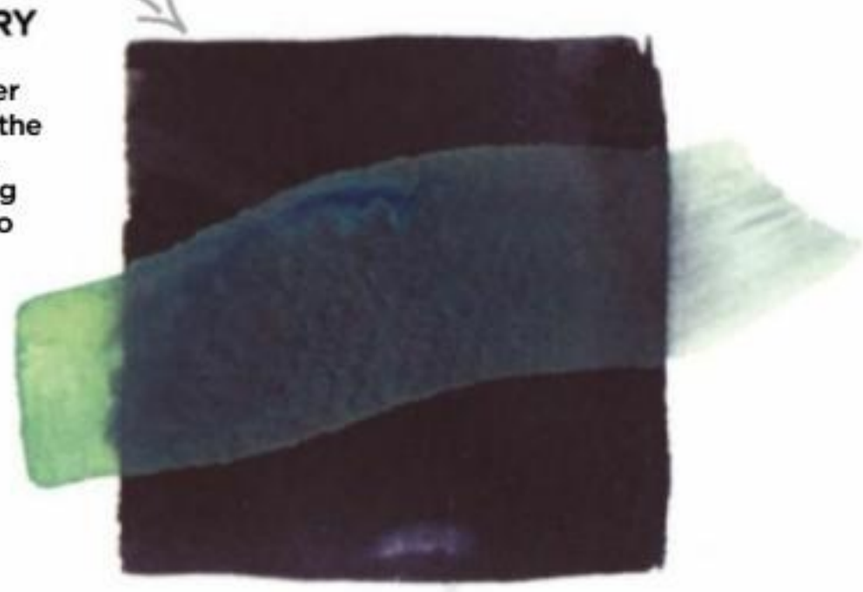
In this crop of a larger painting, I painted the dark background first, and used a liner brush loaded with a fairly thick mixture of paint to lay down some highlights on the fish. Gouache and pastel go very well together, so I even used a touch on some of the brightest areas.

WET BRUSH ON WET

Full bleed between colours. This is ideal for depicting gradients and soft clouds. It's impossible to replicate using any other technique, but is of no use if you're going for a crisp edge.

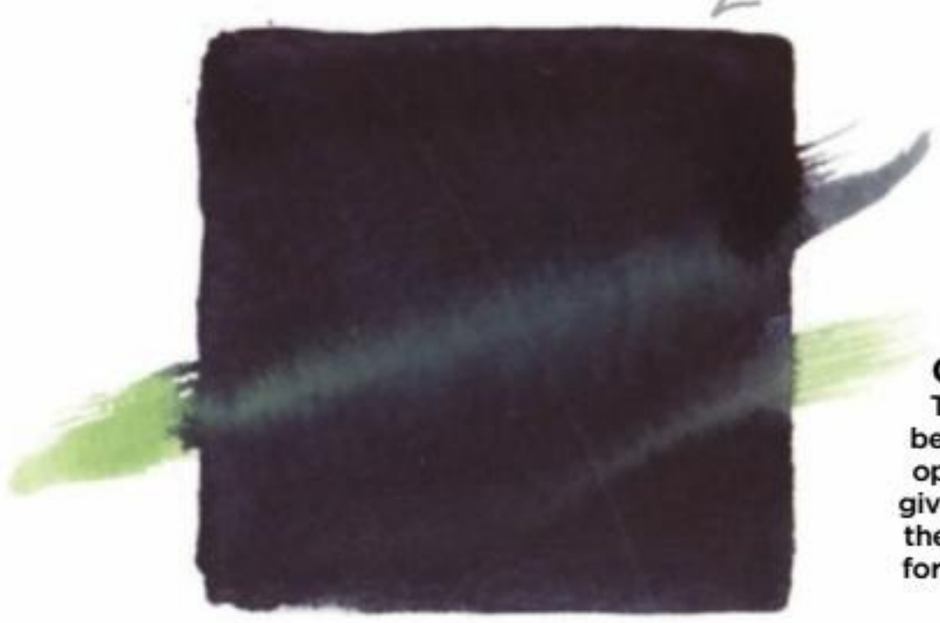
WET BRUSH ON DRY

As you can see, this re-activates the dry layer and causes it to mix with the stroke applied on top. I'd generally avoid doing this unless you intend to rework an area.



DRY BRUSH OVER WET

The brush stroke is almost completely obscured by the bottom layer. It's good for creating smaller, more controlled soft edges.



DRY BRUSH OVER DRY PAPER

There's almost no bleed between colours and great opaque coverage. This will give you a lot of control over the paint, but it's unsuitable for covering large areas and creating soft edges.

3 *Cheating a gradient!*

Usually, you can achieve a decent gradient by just blending two colours over wet paper, but sometimes you can paint yourself into a bit of a corner, or simply change your mind and realise that you need to rework an area.

TRADITIONAL

Here's a two-colour blend using a wet brush on wet paper. It's fairly easy and looks best when done when you leave it alone and let the paint do its own thing. The main drawback is that this doesn't allow for a huge amount of control.

CHEATING

Here's a cheat gradient that I did using a small liner brush. I worked from top to bottom in increasingly more opaque layers, squinting to check my values. The main drawback is that you automatically lose some vibrancy when layering over a darker colour. But this technique can be pretty neat-looking sometimes!

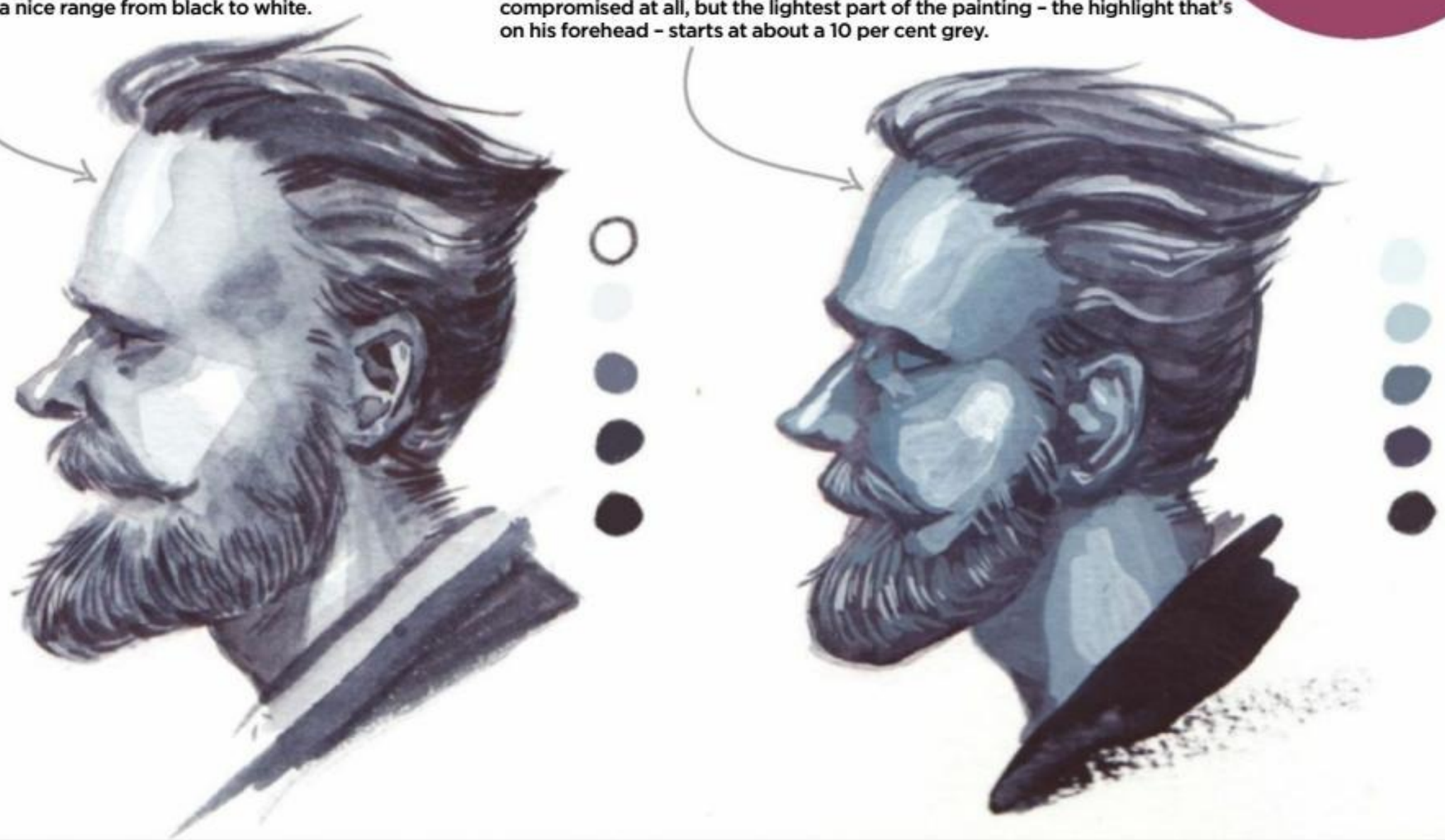
TOUCH IT UP!

MAKE USE OF PAINT REACTIVATION

You can use a damp brush to reactivate dry paint and blend colours.

I've broken-down this painting's tonal range and, as you can see, it's got a nice range from black to white.

I've done the same thing for this painting and it's immediately evident that I don't have as wide a tonal range here. The darker values aren't compromised at all, but the lightest part of the painting – the highlight that's on his forehead – starts at about a 10 per cent grey.



4 *Transparent washes vs working opaquely*

Above, I've painted two side-profiles of the same character to show the difference between using the white of the paper compared to using white out of the tube. The painting on the left was done with transparent washes of black, and the one on the right uses opaque mixtures of black and titanium white.

If you want a nice range of tonal variation, keep some transparency in the work. Use the white of the paper whenever possible: this will give you the brightest, most saturated colours. But if you need to add some accents to a dark area of a piece, use a thicker opaque mixture on a dry brush to avoid paint lifting and muddying them. Here's a crop of a painting with some fairly bright highlights on a dark background. I needed to go over them several times to achieve good opacity.

ARTIST INSIGHT

BE AWARE OF YOUR BRIGHT SPOTS

With gouache, it's important to know that once you cover the white of the paper, you'll almost never be able to achieve that same brightness again using paint.

First Impressions

Tiffany England

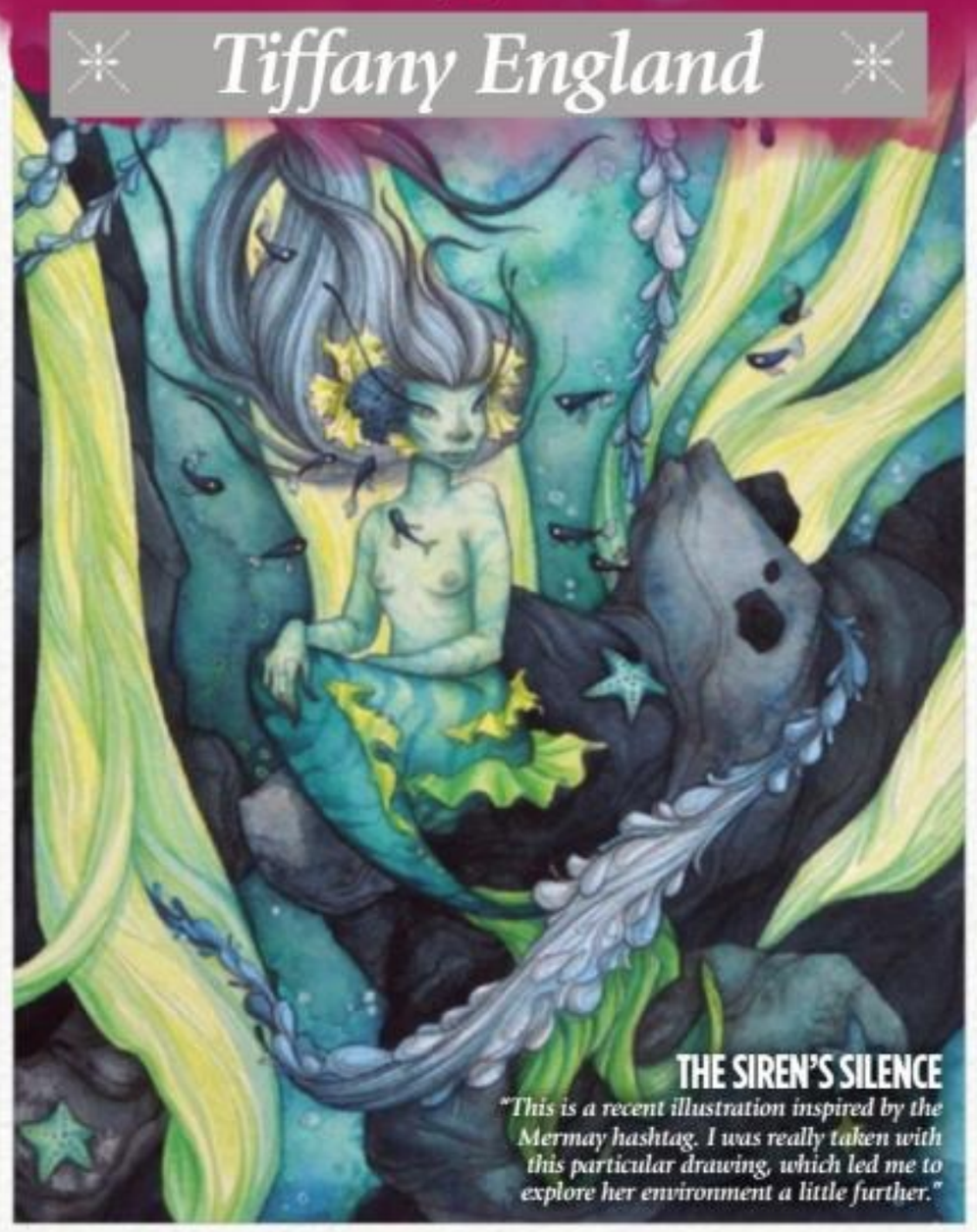
The watercolourist on Norman Rockwell and Kickstarters

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in Mesa, Arizona. My family was very influential in my creativity by encouraging me to play and make up stories. When I got to high school, I was lucky enough to have a dedicated art teacher who gave me a head start on the fundamentals of art and art history.

You're a child, you see a painting that changes everything. Where are you and what are you looking at?
I was lucky enough to get a field trip in high school to see the travelling Norman Rockwell exhibit at the Phoenix Art museum. I was blown away by the expression and characterisation of each painting and thinking to myself, "This is what I want to do. I want to connect with people the same way these paintings connect with me."

What was your next step in art?
After that, I started preparing to take art classes at the community college. I remember I didn't have a specific direction I wanted to go in, but I knew I wanted to explore.

Does one person stand out as being helpful during your early years?
Community college was where I really made the decision to pursue the arts. I had two teachers who fed my art hunger and they couldn't have been more opposite in their approaches. One was a classicist figure painter teaching the fundamentals and the other came from a contemporary perspective encouraging creativity and exploration. Taking their classes made a well-rounded art lesson.



THE SIREN'S SILENCE
"This is a recent illustration inspired by the Mermay hashtag. I was really taken with this particular drawing, which led me to explore her environment a little further."

> **It's important to understand not to put too much emphasis on perfection**

THISTLE QUEEN
"This was inspired by a hike around Watson Lake in Prescott, Arizona. I was fascinated by all the different variations of thistle present in one area."

Tell us about your first paid commissioned piece?
It was three months before I graduated. It was to illustrate several characters for a self-published book about green living. I soon realised that what I learned in school didn't translate equally to real life.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?
My latest illustration was a full-colour, watercolour mermaid painting. My first commission was pen and ink characters. I feel they both are genuinely me, but they differ in material and subject matter. I definitely feel more comfortable using watercolour than ink.

Is your art evolving? What's the most recent experiment you made?
I feel my work is always evolving because there's constant experimentation going on. Just recently I picked up a watercolour sketchbook for experimenting with colours and textures.

What is the most important thing that you've taught someone?
I feel like it's important to understand not to put too much emphasis on perfection, especially the first time you try something. Most of the satisfaction you'll get from creating comes from the process, not the end product.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?
Keep going and make decisions that will keep you true to yourself. Also, don't worry about combining financial stability with your passion. Find work that enables you to pay your bills and is as stress-free as possible, to give you the time to create in your free time.

Can you describe the place where you usually create your art?
I have a very tiny apartment that I share with my sweetheart. My studio space is in the corner of our bedroom. I have a nice wooden drafting table that my parents got for me and I'm surrounded by baskets and jars filled with my art supplies. I have to keep my watercolour paper tucked away in portfolios to stop my silly cat from nibbling on the edges of the paper.

How has the art industry improved since you've been working in it?
It's been encouraging to see independent artists publishing their art books via Kickstarter. This is becoming more important for me to have creative freedom and this avenue provides a viable opportunity for that. I'm excited for the future.

Tiffany is a full-time freelance illustrator who's worked on children's books, trading cards, CD/DVD covers and more. See more of her art at www.tiffanyengland.com.

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